

Løgstrup: Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's Analysis of Existence and Its Relation to Proclamation

Selected Works of K. E. Løgstrup

Series editors: Bjørn Rabjerg and Robert Stern

*Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's Analysis of Existence and Its Relation to Proclamation
The Ethical Demand*

Controverting Kierkegaard

Ethical Concepts and Problems

K. E. Løgstrup

*Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's
Analysis of Existence and
Its Relation to Proclamation*

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
Robert Stern

with

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

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First Edition published in 2020

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019952002

ISBN 978-0-19-885599-6

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

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Translators' Preface

This translation is based on two versions of the primary text. The first is taken from the original German publication: *Kierkegaards und Heideggers Existenzanalyse und ihr Verhältnis zur Verkündigung*, which was published by Erich Blaschker Verlag in Berlin in 1950. The second is the publication of this work in Danish under the title *Kierkegaards og Heideggers existensanalyse og dens forhold til forkyndelsen*, which was edited by Svend Andersen and published by Klim in Aarhus in 2013. This Danish version includes material from Løgstrup's original Danish manuscript of his lectures on which the German version is based, but which was not included in that version. This material has been added to the translation, and is marked by being put in curly brackets. In the translation, page numbers to the German edition are given in square brackets in normal text, while those to the Danish edition are given in italics. In the rare cases where the same text differs between the two versions, this is pointed out in the editorial notes.

In the original book, when citing Kierkegaard, Løgstrup gave references to the collected works in German (*Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Hermann Gottsched and Christoph Schrempf (Jena: Diederichs, 1909–22)). This has been changed to references first to *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols 1–28 and K1–28, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–2013), abbreviated to 'SKS', and then to the corresponding English translation: this is either *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vols 1–25, edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979–2009), abbreviated to 'KW'; or *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 7 vols, 2nd edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), abbreviated to 'KJP'. In all cases, references are given by volume number and page. While the translation of Kierkegaard into English is based on the KW or KJP versions, this has been adapted in many cases. In some instances, Løgstrup did not give references for his citations, but where these have been identified references have been added in square brackets.

Regarding the issue of gendered language, the way we have addressed this problem is to use male pronouns only where Løgstrup clearly intended to be referring to a man, or where he himself has written 'he and she'; otherwise, we have used the third-person plural pronouns even in cases where a single individual is meant, in a way that is becoming increasingly common in modern English (and indeed was pretty standard at various times in the past), and avoids

both a pile-up of words and the arbitrariness of picking between male or female to avoid the difficulty. However, in some passages, usually when discussing Heidegger and the issue of abandonment, we have used the male singular, as in these contexts it might cause confusion to use the plural, when it is important to understand that it is an isolated individual who is under discussion.

There are also some terms used in the text which create difficulties for translation from German (and Danish) into English, and which therefore call for some comment here:

authority (*Instand/instans*): This has been translated as 'authority', but in German and Danish it has this meaning in a rather special sense. While the term can mean authority in the sense of lawgiving, arguably its primary meaning is as an authority which judges in relation to the law, not one which lays down or legislates the law in the first place, where in the legal context the term is usually used to refer to the system of courts. This usage has an echo in English in the phrases 'first instance' and 'last instance', which stems from the first and last steps in a legal proceedings. In German and Danish it is also a sort of dummy sortal, like 'thing' or 'entity'.

blessedness (*Seligkeit/salighed*): A religious term, conveying the idea of eternal happiness or bliss.

care (*Sorge*): The term 'Sorge' has been translated as 'care'. Even in his Danish text, Løgstrup just uses the German term, or the Latin 'cura'. This is another concept associated with Heidegger, meaning that what you do, the entities you deal with, and the people with whom you are involved all offer ways of articulating who you are and, therefore, matter to your existence.

demand (*Forderung/fordring*): With the publication of Løgstrup's later main work, *Den etiske fordring*, this can be seen as one of his most central concepts, and has here been translated as 'demand', which has also been the practice in previous literature and translations. Both in German and in Danish, the term involves someone being asked, required, demanded, claimed, or called to do something and as such it involves a range of possible meanings, some of which can come very close to including the idea of a 'command'. However, Løgstrup employs the term to cover the idea that something is being demanded of you without this demand being a *command*. In making this contrast, Løgstrup's use of the word implies that the reason to act is the content of what is required, rather than the authority of any commander, and so one is not just blindly following what one is commanded to do, but one's action should be based on the capacity to *understand* rather than the willingness to obey (cf. 'Ethics and Ontology',

pp. 291–2). As Løgstrup makes clear in this text, the terminology of a demand is also common in Kierkegaard's works, where Kierkegaard speaks of the 'infinite demand' (*den uendelige fordring*) and also of 'love's demand' (*kjerlighedens fordring*) and 'the demand of the law' (*lovens fordring*), so in using this terminology Løgstrup stands in a Kierkegaardian tradition. In the *Kierkegaard's Writings* translation of Kierkegaard published by Princeton University Press, 'fordring' is rendered as 'requirement', which might obscure this connection to Løgstrup for English readers.

existence (*Dasein/tilværelse*): The term 'Dasein' is particularly associated with Heidegger. Wanting to avoid characterizing human being as *things*, Heidegger adopted the term *Dasein* to capture that the way humans have of being, is as a *being there*, *da sein* in German. The Danish word 'tilværelse' can be translated either as 'life' or 'existence', and is also the term that Løgstrup uses for Heidegger's 'Dasein'. The translation uses 'existence' to render these terms.

factual, subject matter, to the point (*Sachlich/saglig*): The term 'sachlich' can appear in a variety of contexts which makes it hard to translate consistently, so that different options have been used depending on that context, for example 'factual', 'subject matter', 'to the point', 'objective'. The Danish word 'saglig' has the same meaning as German 'sachlich' and means to stick to the concrete case (*sag*) rather than to draw into focus things that shouldn't matter. Thus, to be 'saglig' involves matter-of-factness, being objective, rational, and sticking to the concrete and factual.

fundamental mood (*Grundstimmung/grundstemning*): The word 'Grundstimmung' is another Heideggerian term, which has been translated as 'fundamental mood'. It is close to an all-pervasive background feeling at the ground (*Grund*) of our existence, making it difficult to detect.

idle talk (*Gerede/snak*): The term 'Gerede' is also a term associated with Heidegger, which linguistically has pejorative implications. Sometimes rendered as 'idle chatter', this translation has rendered it as 'idle talk'.

imagination (*Phantasie/fantasi*): The term 'Phantasie' has been translated as 'imagination' when referring to the mental capacity, but it also has connotations of 'fantasy' and thus wishful thinking and daydreaming. Løgstrup could have chosen to use 'Einbildung' or 'Vorstellung' (in German) and 'inbildning' or 'forestilling' (in Danish) as more neutral terms for imagination, but does not do so because he wishes to suggest the relation between imagining and fantasizing.

one (*Man/man*): 'Das Man' is a Heideggerian term, which has been translated as 'one', meaning the impersonal or the general, which is therefore associated by Løgstrup with the Kierkegaardian theme of life in the crowd.

spirit (*Geist/ånd*): The word 'Geist' is a notoriously difficult term to translate into English, as it can be rendered as both 'mind' and 'spirit', but neither is quite right, as it relates in some ways to both: 'mind' on its own sounds too purely mentalistic and tied merely to consciousness, while 'spirit' can sound too spectral and metaphysical. The difficulty can be illustrated by the way in which *Geist* in German (and *ånd* in Danish) can be used to discuss both mental illness and the Holy Spirit. In this text, we have decided to go with 'spirit', which works reasonably well in most contexts, but issues with this translation need to be taken into account when the word is used in the text.

Finally, we have followed Danish practice in capitalizing only the first letter in titles of works published in Danish after 1948, but have followed English practice in capitalizing all significant words for English titles; and in the Select Bibliography and the Index we have followed the Danish system of putting the special characters 'æ', 'ø', and 'å' at the end of the alphabet, so that for example 'Luther' is listed before 'Løgstrup'.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the following for their very helpful comments on previous versions of this translation: David Batho, Henk de Berg, George Pattison, and Bjørn Rabjerg.

A Chronology of Løgstrup's Life and Works

- 1905 (2 September) Born in Copenhagen, Denmark
- 1923–30 Studies theology at the University of Copenhagen while also following lectures on philosophy, in particular Frithiof Brandt's series of lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*
- 1930–5 Research visits at various universities, mainly in Germany, but also in France, Switzerland, and Austria
- 1932 Awarded the gold medal for his prize essay (similar to a PhD dissertation) on Max Scheler's phenomenological approach to ethics: *En fremstilling og vurdering af Max Scheler's: 'Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik'* [An Exposition and Evaluation of Max Scheler's: 'Formalism in Ethics and Material Ethics of Value'] (published 2016)
- 1935 Marriage to Rosemarie Pauly (1914–2005); they had five children
- 1936–43 Returns to Denmark. Lutheran pastor on Funen. Becomes part of the Tidehverv movement
- 1943 Defends his higher doctoral dissertation *Den erkendelsesteoretiske Konflikt mellem den transcendentalfilosofiske Idealisme og Teologien* [The Epistemological Conflict between Transcendental Idealism and Theology], which was published in 1942. Becomes professor of ethics and philosophy of religion at Aarhus University, Denmark (new Danish critical edition published 2011)
- 1944 Goes underground for the remainder of World War II due to his involvement in the resistance movement
- 1948 Earliest signs of disagreement with Tidehverv
- 1950 Gives a series of lectures on Kierkegaard and Heidegger at the *Freie Universität Berlin*, published the same year as *Kierkegaards und Heideggers Existenzanalyse und ihr Verhältnis zur Verkündigung* [Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's Analysis of Existence and Its Relation to Proclamation] (Danish publication 2013)
- 1952 *Kants filosofi I* [Kant's Philosophy I] (reprinted in 1970 as Part 1 of *Kants kritik af erkendelsen og refleksionen* [Kant's Critique of Knowledge and Reflection])

- 1956 *Den etiske fordring* [The Ethical Demand]
- 1961 Breaks with Tidehverv (final break in 1964)
Kunst og etik [Art and Ethics]
Becomes a member of the Danish Academy
- 1965 *Kants æstetik* [Kant's Aesthetics]
- 1968 *Opgør med Kierkegaard* [Controverting Kierkegaard]
- 1970 *Kants kritik af erkendelsen og refleksionen* [Kant's Critique of Knowledge and Reflection]
- 1971 *Etiske begreber og problemer* [Ethical Concepts and Problems]
published as a contribution to an anthology on ethics and Christian faith (published as a book in 1996)
- 1972 *Norm og spontaneitet* [Norm and Spontaneity]
- 1974 Awarded the Amalienborg Prize. This prize was inaugurated in 1972, and is awarded by the Queen of Denmark to an outstanding Danish scholar or writer
- 1976 *Vidde og prægnans* [Breadth and Fullness], the first volume of the *Metaphysics I–IV* series
- 1978 *Metaphysics IV: Skabelse og tilintetgørelse* [Creation and Annihilation]
- 1981 Dies on 20 November in his home in Hyllested, north-east of Aarhus
- 1982 *System og symbol* [System and Symbol]
- 1983 *Metaphysics II: Kunst og erkendelse* [Art and Knowledge]
- 1984 *Metaphysics III: Ophav og omgivelse* [Source and Surrounding]
- 1984 *Det uomtvistelige* [What Is Incontrovertible]
- 1987 *Solidaritet og kærlighed og andre essays* [Solidarity and Love and Other Essays]
- 1988 *Udfordringer* [Challenges]
- 1992 *Kære Hal – Kære Koste* [Dear Hal – Dear Koste] (letter correspondence, reprinted and expanded in 2010 in *Venskab og strid* [Friendship and Strife])
- 1995 *Prædikener fra Sandager-Holevad* [Sermons from Sandager-Holevad]
- 1996 *Martin Heidegger*
- 1999 *Prædikenen og dens Tekst* [The Sermon and its Text]
- 2010 *Venskab og strid* [Friendship and Strife] (letter correspondence)

Introduction

Robert Stern

1 Background

When Løgstrup gave these lectures on Kierkegaard and Heidegger in Berlin in 1950, he chose not merely to offer an account of some of their central ideas, but also to situate himself critically in relation to these two thinkers. The lectures form the basis of this book, which was to be Løgstrup's first publication that focused on their work at length, while each was to receive further discussion in later writings;¹ but the treatment they receive here is particularly interesting, as it comes at a time when Løgstrup's own ideas were developing at this relatively early stage in his career, six years prior to the publication of his major work *The Ethical Demand*. These lectures thus provide us with a way to understand both what ultimately dissatisfied Løgstrup about Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and how he hoped to go beyond them; they therefore enable us to see how this critical engagement shaped his own thinking in a fundamental way.

The lectures themselves came about after Løgstrup was contacted by the newly founded Freie Universität in Berlin, suggesting the visit. The university was keen to establish its credentials, having just been founded in response to deteriorating relations between the two sides of the city during the Cold War, which meant that an alternative institution was needed in the western zone, as the original university established by Wilhelm von Humboldt was in the Russian-controlled sector.

¹ In addition to the Berlin lectures, Kierkegaard is extensively discussed later in the 'Polemical Epilogue' to *The Ethical Demand*, and forms the focus of *Controverting Kierkegaard* (1968). Heidegger is mentioned in Løgstrup's doctoral dissertation, which he passed in 1943: *The Epistemological Conflict between Transcendental Idealism and Theology*. And he wrote a manuscript on Heidegger's *Being and Time* intended for teaching purposes around the same time as the Berlin lectures. This was published later as the first part of *Martin Heidegger*, originally published in 1996. See 'Select Bibliography' for full bibliographical details of these works, and others mentioned in this Introduction.

As the official letter of invitation from the prominent historian and rector Friedrich Meinecke notes, Løgstrup was to be one of the first foreign researchers to visit the new institution. For Løgstrup himself, it was a welcome opportunity to return to Germany after the upheaval caused by World War II and the Nazi occupation of Denmark, an occupation that Løgstrup had played an active part in resisting. Before the war, he had used funding from a prize essay to travel widely in Europe, including visits to study with Heidegger in Freiburg in 1933–4 and with the phenomenologist Hans Lipps and theologian Friedrich Gogarten in Göttingen. While in Freiburg, he was to meet his future wife Rosemarie Pauly, who as a native German speaker doubtless helped him translate his original Danish manuscript for these lectures, and who was later to translate many of his works for publication in Germany.

As a result of these travels, Løgstrup was one of the first from Denmark to encounter Heidegger's thought, and it clearly had significance for him throughout his life; however, like others he was to be shocked by Heidegger's evident Nazi sympathies, which Løgstrup recognized first hand during his time in Freiburg, and which he was to condemn in print before the war.² Nonetheless, Løgstrup saw the need for reconciliation in the post-war period, and to help restore the kind of academic interchange from which he had benefitted previously, as can be seen from a document concerning his visit to the Freie Universität:

I thank you for your invitation and the honour you have thereby done me. I think with particular gratitude of my studies at German universities. I remember the kind and willing openness that was always shown to foreigners at German universities. I very much regret that because of the exceptional situation, young Danes must give up a stay at German universities for the purposes of further research and education, and hope that the possibility for contact will be available again soon. For me, as for many others, staying in Germany has been decisive thanks to its inspiration. Courage to really think thoughts through to the end, the piercing through, that is so characteristic of German thought, is tremendously exciting. I want now to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for what I owe to German universities.³

It is this attitude that perhaps explains why in the lectures Løgstrup chose to focus his comments on Heidegger solely on the latter's philosophical ideas, and not on his political sympathies and any possible connection between these and

² 'Nazismens filosof' [The Nazi's Philosopher], *Dagens Nyheder*, 14 April 1936 (translation available at: <https://ethicaldemand.wordpress.com/resources-and-link/>); 'Førerskab og diktatur I' [Fuhrership and Dictatorship], *Dagens Nyheder*, 24 June 1936; 'Førerskab og diktatur II', *Dagens Nyheder*, 25 June 1936.

³ This letter is cited by Svend Andersen in his afterword to the Danish edition of the lectures, *Kierkegaards og Heideggers eksistensanalyse og dens forhold til forkyndelesen*, p. 121.

his philosophy, though this might have been expected given that this seems to have been the first time Heidegger's work was discussed so publicly in Germany after the war. Instead, having originally told his hosts he would speak only about Kierkegaard, Løgstrup juxtaposed Heidegger's thought alongside Kierkegaard's, reading them both as providing an 'analysis of existence' which he was to expound and criticize.

These lectures also come at an interesting point in Løgstrup's relations to Kierkegaard. In 1936, Løgstrup had joined the group associated with the journal *Tidehverv*, which was founded in 1926. One of its main editors and contributors was Kristoffer Olesen Larsen, a leading Kierkegaard scholar, who made a significant positive impression on Løgstrup in this period. However, as the Berlin lectures show, Løgstrup was to come to have misgivings about Kierkegaard's position over the next few decades, though at the time of these lectures his relatively moderate tone suggests that he still hoped for some rapprochement with Olesen Larsen and others over Kierkegaard. This was not to be, as in fact Olesen Larsen responded to Løgstrup's developing position in a very negative way,⁴ and used Kierkegaard as his main ally in criticizing Løgstrup; in response, Løgstrup then distanced himself further from Kierkegaard, so that by the time of *The Ethical Demand*, the tone of his criticisms of Kierkegaard had become much more strident, as reflected in the 'polemical epilogue' in that work, and as developed further in his book from 1968: *Controverting Kierkegaard*.⁵ Nonetheless, the seeds of Løgstrup's dissatisfaction with Kierkegaard can be seen clearly in the key objections that he raises in these lectures, together with his own attempts to develop a philosophical position that will more satisfactorily handle the central issues that Kierkegaard's work raises.

2 Commentary

The lectures were held as a series on 12, 14, 18, and 19 January in 1950. Eight lectures were given, which were then structured into eight chapters in the published text. This text is also divided into two parts, the first more expository, the second more critical.⁶

⁴ K. Olesen Larsen, 'Den uendelige fordring og kærligheden til næsten' [The Infinite Demand and Love of the Neighbour].

⁵ This has become the standard way of translating the title of the work *Opgør med Kierkegaard*, but in fact 'opgør' could also be translated as 'confrontation' or even 'showdown', making 'controverting' sound rather tame.

⁶ Unattributed references in this Introduction are to the present book, followed by a reference to the Danish edition. Other references to books by Løgstrup are given first to English translations where available, and then to the Danish originals. Full bibliographical details are given in the Select

2.1 *The problem of life in the crowd*

The lectures begin with a discussion of a fundamental problem which Løgstrup thinks both Kierkegaard and Heidegger recognize, and which he too takes very seriously, namely how to avoid living a life that is governed by others and so is inauthentic, trapped within the humdrum and the mundane—a life in the crowd. Put very simply, Løgstrup's fundamental theme in these lectures is that while Kierkegaard and Heidegger are right to identify this problem, they fail to find an adequate solution for it, as they go too far in the opposite direction, thereby abstracting from our finite existence and relation to others altogether—where Løgstrup offers his own alternative middle way instead, between the 'idle talk' of the crowd on the one hand, and the empty abstractions represented by Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the other. It is in identifying this middle way, as we shall see, that Løgstrup comes to develop his distinctive characterization of an ethical demand which lies between these two extremes, and which gives his ethical thinking its distinctive shape. Thus, in understanding Løgstrup's critical engagement with Kierkegaard and Heidegger, we can see how he came to offer his own alternative conception in response to the shortcomings he identified in each of his predecessors.

In this first chapter, Løgstrup begins by focusing on Kierkegaard, and in general it is Kierkegaard who receives more attention than Heidegger in these lectures.⁷ Citing from a number of works, Løgstrup brings out how Kierkegaard characterizes 'life in the crowd', and traces back its fundamental cause as a concern with our worldly or temporal interests. The result is a kind of 'busyness', whereby we disperse ourselves into a plurality of activities which occupy us, and make decisions on the basis of the views of others, while in an anxious manner constantly comparing ourselves to them and judging ourselves through their

Bibliography. Abbreviations that are used to refer to Kierkegaard's works are explained in the Translators' Preface.

⁷ As Andersen notes in his afterword, Løgstrup himself made clear that the primary focus is Kierkegaard in his introductory comments, the manuscript of which was among his papers: 'Concerning my lectures I want to make two prefatory remarks. When about a year ago I had to specify the subject of my lectures, I did so in a very broad sense as "Kierkegaard and the philosophy of existence". In preparing them, however, for the sake of focus concerning the philosophy of existence, I have restricted myself to Heidegger. In this context it is not my intention to simply be content with delivering an account of what is common and different in Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's problematics; this material I will deal with in my first five lectures, while the three final lectures contain more of a critical treatment—particularly of Kierkegaard's views. On the whole, I will concern myself more with Kierkegaard than with Heidegger. Furthermore, I will examine the relationship between philosophy, life-view and proclamation based on Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's problematic' (*Kierkegaards og Heideggers existensanalyse*, p. 124).

eyes; at the same time, this is compatible with rejecting mere uniformity and seeking to be superior to those around us, while also recognizing that to learn about oneself from others is to learn from those who do not know themselves. The consequence is a life in illusion and mindlessness or spiritual emptiness (*Geistlosigkeit*), where instead of thinking for oneself, one follows tradition and custom as the highest form of ethical life, in a manner that Kierkegaard associates with Hegel. Løgstrup argues that for Heidegger, similar issues are raised in his contrast between authentic and inauthentic existence, where he focuses in particular on Heidegger's account of 'idle talk' and of 'curiosity', both of which are distorted forms of genuine engagement with others and the world. As with Kierkegaard, Løgstrup argues that for Heidegger this is held to come about through an excessive focus on things in this world, which arises as a result of 'care' and self-concern, so that in this way the individual becomes part of life in the 'one' or 'the man' (*das Man*).

However, while arguing that the accounts offered by Kierkegaard and Heidegger 'complement' each other, Løgstrup also identifies what he takes to be a fundamental difference: namely, that Kierkegaard's critique is fuelled by an 'ethical passion' (9/17) in a way that Heidegger's is not. Løgstrup suggests that this has two sources in Kierkegaard: first, it is part of his wider hostility to Hegelian speculative philosophy, which Kierkegaard thinks also turns us away from the individual to the general; and second, it connects to Kierkegaard's attempt to rescue Christianity from 'Christendom', through which the former is submerged into the bland uniformity of churchly practices. Løgstrup thus thinks these wider concerns give Kierkegaard's critique of life in the crowd a normative significance and importance that it lacks in Heidegger, whom he presents as purporting to offer a more neutral and merely philosophical (or ontological) analysis. Moreover, while he thinks that on Heidegger's account, life in the crowd is made an inevitable feature of human existence, for Kierkegaard it can be avoided if instead of relating absolutely to merely relative ends through what is finite and temporal, we manage to relate instead to absolute ends in a religious manner. How this might be possible for Kierkegaard forms the focus of Løgstrup's next chapter.

2.2 Kierkegaard on the self

Løgstrup begins this discussion with Kierkegaard's account of the self in a famously difficult passage from *The Sickness unto Death*:

The human being is spirit [*Geist*]. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself, or more precisely, is that in the relation, that is the relation relating itself to itself; the self is not the relation, but that which relates the

relation to itself. The human being is a synthesis of infinity and finitude, of temporality and eternity, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two things. Seen in this way a human being is still not a self.

In the relation between the two, the relation is the third as negative unity, and the two relate themselves to the relation, and in relation to the relation; thus under the determination of the soul, the relation between the soul and the body is a relation. If on the contrary the relation relates itself to itself, then this relation is the positive third, and that is the self.⁸

Løgstrup argues that Kierkegaard here treats the self as consisting of not just a synthesis between soul and body, but also between infinity and finitude or temporality and eternity. Both syntheses involve a relation between elements, but in different ways: whereas the self is merely reflexively conscious of the soul-body relation, the relation between infinity and finitude is itself determined by how the self relates to infinity and finitude through its actions, so that 'the relation relates itself to itself' and hence is not just reflexive but involves a 'doubling', as the relation that the self stands in with respect to the finite and infinite is itself impacted by how it relates to this relation. This difference is made possible for Kierkegaard, Løgstrup suggests, because such actions relate to a *demand* as a 'third', where it is through the self's response to that demand that its relation as a finite individual to the infinite is determined, in its decision to obey or disobey. The relation here is thus not one of which the self is just cognitively aware, as it is of the relation between soul and body, but depends on how the self responds *practically*, through the decision to act taken in the light of this demand; in this way, my possibilities as a self are settled and the kind of synthesis between finite and infinite that I come to embody will be established.

Because the self is constituted by a synthesis of finite and infinite in this way, Løgstrup argues that for Kierkegaard a human being is not a 'metaphysically unambiguous being' as they would be if they could treat themselves as purely finite, on whom the infinite makes no demand. On the other hand, infinity does not belong securely within a human being's essence, as their relation to the infinite can be lost. Løgstrup argues that Kierkegaard overcomes this apparent contradiction by treating the infinite as part of a human being's existence, though not of their essence insofar as it can be lost; but even when lost, it still belongs to a human being's existence, as to relate to the infinite in loss is still to relate to the infinite in some sense, so that even in the loss of infinity a human being remains in the relation between the finite and infinite.

⁸ SKS 11: 129/KW 19: 13.

This clearly puts the self in a highly problematic position. On the one hand, to retain its finitude and individuality it must in some sense break off or tear itself away from infinity; but it cannot be merely finite either, as it must still stand in *some* relation to the infinite. One way to accomplish this, as we have seen, is to stand in a *negative* relation to the finite in loss, which in ethical terms is a relation of guilt with respect to the demand, as something one knows one should fulfil (thus standing in relation to the infinite) but cannot (thus acknowledging one's finitude). Likewise, the finite self can relate to the infinite in becoming or movement, as a goal towards which one must continually strive but cannot obtain, an effort in which the self is passionately engaged. As a result, Løgstrup argues, for Kierkegaard 'existence is a monstrous contradiction and a permanent effort' (19/30), as the self is forced to deal with these two contradictory aspects of its selfhood in a way that it cannot fully resolve.

This then leads Løgstrup back to the issue of 'life in the crowd' from which he began. For, he suggests, Kierkegaard sees 'life in the crowd' as one way to try to become oblivious to this 'monstrous contradiction', and to 'give up the effort of holding together the incompatible' (19/30), as in this life the individual seeks just to remain within the relative and finite, and to forget the absolute and infinite. The other option is to go in the opposite direction, and for the individual to instead forget that they are finite, which for Kierkegaard is the course taken by the Hegelian speculative philosopher who abstracts away from human existence in a form of pure thinking that claims to attain the absolute. As well as trying to escape a fundamental tension which cannot in fact be resolved, both these options drain away the passion that comes from engaging with this tension, and thus come at a significant loss to the human spirit.

2.3 *Death or demand*

Having connected together Kierkegaard's account of life in the crowd with his analysis of existence, Løgstrup now does the same for Heidegger in Chapter 3, while also pointing to certain crucial similarities and differences between the two thinkers. For, Løgstrup suggests, while they share broadly the same view of the self as involving becoming and movement, whereas for Kierkegaard this can be traced back to its relation to the infinite demand, for Heidegger it can be traced back to 'care' or '*Sorge*', through which the individual takes on responsibility for themselves in a way that can never be finished or concluded. On Heidegger's account, therefore, the self is always 'in advance of itself' in caring for its existence in the world, where for Heidegger it is in how the self responds to this fact—rather than how it responds to the infinite demand, as on Kierkegaard's account—that it comes to be determined as a self.

Likewise, the threat of 'life in the crowd' also plays out somewhat differently in the case of each thinker. For Kierkegaard, as we have seen, this life leads the individual to one-sidedly resolve the tension between finite and infinite in favour of the former. By contrast, on Løgstrup's account, in Heidegger the crowd sets the framework in which the individual seeks to determine its possibilities for existence, as the individual accepts these possibilities as given to it by others. However, Løgstrup argues, Heidegger treated conscience as a way in which the individual might overcome this situation, and so move from inauthenticity to authenticity, as conscience forces the individual to think for themselves and recognize that they are entirely on their own in determining how to act. But this sense of being on one's own in an essentially meaningless world then creates a feeling of anxiety in the individual, which causes them to go back to seeking the comfort of life in the crowd, though at any time this can break down as the feeling of nothingness returns.

This oscillation can be seen most clearly, Løgstrup suggests, in Heidegger's treatment of death. On the one hand, the individual's death is always something they can only take on themselves, as a possibility for them alone; but on the other hand, the anxiety that this induces in the individual can easily lead them to seek comfort in the view of death taken by the crowd as just one more event in life, which distracts the individual from looking this possibility firmly in the eye. Nonetheless, for Heidegger, it is by relating to their own death in the right way that the individual can escape from the crowd, and achieve an authentic existence by facing up to the anxiety that death induces.

Løgstrup then contrasts the role that death plays in Heidegger's account, with the role of the infinite in Kierkegaard's. He argues that for both, an important way to escape life in the crowd is to recognize that existence is becoming and possibility, rather than being fixed and determined through conformity to social norms and expectations, and the judgement of others. For Heidegger, death is precisely a possibility that cannot be realized within life, and so stands outside this assimilation by the 'one'. By contrast, for Kierkegaard it is the impossibility of realizing the infinite demand that makes it a possibility of this kind, as lying beyond the finite existence of the individual. The action of the individual therefore cannot consist in realizing the demand, but just in deciding to act on it. Løgstrup also suggests that this difference between Heidegger and Kierkegaard leads to a further difference, concerning the nature of anxiety and its relation to nothingness. For Heidegger, this simply stems from a sense of the insignificance of everything finite, including the individual's existence. On the other hand, for Kierkegaard this sense of nothingness and the insignificance of the finite is grounded in something else, namely the infinite demand, so that Kierkegaard's

‘whole thought is ethically determined’ in a way that Heidegger’s is not: ‘Even the nothingness of anxiety is ethically determined—namely, from the perspective of infinity’ (29/43).

Løgstrup then concludes this chapter by summarizing the differences he has highlighted between these two thinkers. For both, the human being is concerned with their existence; but while for Heidegger this is because the individual human being is abandoned to themselves, for Kierkegaard this is because existence is demanded. For both, the individual relates to themselves in a doubling relation; but while for Heidegger this comes about through conscience calling the individual to their own mortality, for Kierkegaard it comes about through a decision in relation to the infinite demand. And for both, there is a negativity at the basis of existence, which for Heidegger is the fact that the individual human being is abandoned in a world which is meaningless and without significance, but for Kierkegaard stems from the human being’s exclusion from the infinite and the eternal, and thus from what has ultimate meaning.

2.4 Kierkegaard on becoming a self

At the start of Chapter 4, Løgstrup thus claims to have identified two fundamental oppositions that are crucial to both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, though their ways of dealing with them differ. The oppositions are on the one hand between life in the crowd and life as an authentic individual, and on the other hand between existence as realized and life as possibility; and the two are connected, insofar as existence as possibility means that life is not ossified into life in the crowd, whereas to live life in the crowd is to be committed to what one has realized (and plans to realize in the future) and what one is in the eyes of others, rather than to what one can become. Likewise, at a formal level, both Kierkegaard and Heidegger offer the same kind of solution, namely they set up something ‘absolute and radical’ (31/45) that cannot be realized, in relation to which each individual must respond for themselves rather than follow the crowd. However, while for Kierkegaard this is the infinite and eternal, for Heidegger this is death.

Løgstrup now raises the question of

how, on closer inspection, the desire to be individual or true to the character of their existence as becoming and movement is expressed in the concrete existence of humanity. How can the relation to infinity, to eternity, or to death penetrate the concrete existence of a human being? How does the relation to this absolute and radical have any impact? (32/46)

Here again he identifies a difference between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, arguing that while the latter poses the question, he does not spend much time on it, as his philosophy is intended as an ontology and not a philosophy of existence as such;

by contrast, this issue ‘plays a decisive role in Kierkegaard’s thought as a whole’: ‘He circles round the problem again and again and tries to deal with it this way and that; it can therefore rightly be called *the* problem of his life and thought’ (32/46). Løgstrup thus sets Heidegger aside in this chapter, and focuses just on Kierkegaard.

For Kierkegaard, Løgstrup suggests, the concrete existence of the individual consists in their capacities and inclinations, as well as their place in the social framework with the roles and obligations this involves, which between them set the finite and temporal goals for the individual. As a result, for most people their existence will involve following life in the crowd, as they stick to rather humdrum goals and projects, and conform to their station and its duties. The only exception to this pattern is the genius, who has exceptional capacities and inclinations that set them apart from others; but essentially the genius is still letting themselves be guided by their abilities and place in the world, and so there is no real ‘ethical difference’ (33/47) between the genius and the rest of us.

As Løgstrup has already suggested, he takes it that for Kierkegaard the only way to really move beyond life in the crowd is ‘in penetrating one’s concrete existence through one’s relation to infinity and eternity’ (33/47). But now he asks what this means for the individual, in more detail. To answer this, Løgstrup begins by looking at Kierkegaard’s discussion of the imagination in *The Sickness unto Death*, which Løgstrup takes to provide ‘a psychological basis for his view that the human being through infinity and eternity becomes spirit or a self’ (33/48). On Kierkegaard’s account, Løgstrup argues, the imagination is capable of a ‘movement of infinitization’, of taking us beyond the finite. However, it is also capable of losing the self altogether to a purely imaginary form of being, in which the individual forgets their own finitude and concrete existence. At the level of feeling, imagination can seem to take us beyond our own emotions to a more general and abstract feeling of humanity as a whole; at the level of thought, it can lead us to seek a knowledge that is boundless; and at the level of action, it can set before us an unattainable goal. In order to counteract this movement of infinitization and its tendency to abstractness and to cause forgetfulness of our own finitude, Kierkegaard thus also insists on a movement that goes in the opposite direction, towards the finite, and the taking over of concrete existence. But how are both movements to be accomplished?

Kierkegaard’s answer, Løgstrup argues, lies in his account of the individual’s decision to act. On the one hand, in deciding to act, it is a mistake to think that what one can do is entirely open—that who one is should play no role in how one acts—for this is to treat oneself as a purely self-creating being and the ground of oneself, which is a view that Heidegger as well as Kierkegaard would reject, where

for the latter it is the eternal and infinite that is the ground of one's existence. On the other hand, to simply act in a way that seems fixed by who one is already would be to follow life in the crowd and to deny that existence involves possibility and becoming. For Kierkegaard, the individual must therefore decide to act not in the light of the finite and temporal, but of the infinite and eternal which is the ground of their existence, which is thus to act in the light of an infinite demand which comes from God. In this way, the individual both acknowledges a ground for their existence and so avoids the empty infinitization of the imagination as they are forced to recognize their finitude; but the individual also finds a basis for their decision in something that lies outside the finite world of life in the crowd and so still does justice to the movement of infinitization.

The question then arises, what the infinite demand involves, what it requires of us. Based on Kierkegaard's discussion in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Løgstrup argues that it consists in the demand 'to express in existing, that the individual is really capable of nothing, but is nothing before God'. However, insofar as we act in relation to our desires and capacities, we do seem capable of something, which is why (Løgstrup argues) for Kierkegaard 'a life in obedience to the infinite demand is a life of renunciation and suffering', insisting that 'Kierkegaard therefore returns in almost all his writings to the point that the individual can only relate themselves to God in suffering' (37/53). To this extent, therefore, the demand may be considered a mere abstraction, as to demonstrate their nothingness the individual 'dies away' from everything that gives content to the will in a manner that parallels the one-sided infinitization of the imagination which was rejected previously, as a denial of our finitude and hence humanity.

However, Løgstrup allows that Kierkegaard recognizes this problem, and sought to address it in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, where Kierkegaard rejects the medieval model of monastic life, but seeks instead to find a way in which the individual can live with others in the world, while still fulfilling the demand to express their nothingness before God. The difference is that while the monastic life involves a form of 'external' renunciation, modern life for Kierkegaard should involve a form of 'inner' renunciation, consistent with an existence that acknowledges our humanity and thus our finite interests and needs. The question for Løgstrup, therefore, is whether on Kierkegaard's account, one can indeed act on such interests and needs in an external manner on the one hand, while still conforming to the infinite demand on the other, and so taking seriously one's nothingness before God. To see whether Kierkegaard's position is coherent in this regard, Løgstrup discusses in some detail Kierkegaard's account of the 'edifying diversion' of a trip to the Deer Park in Copenhagen, which he presents at some length in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, where in the end Løgstrup

argues that Kierkegaard's account of this example reveals a deep difficulty in his point of view.

Løgstrup starts by noting that Kierkegaard holds that the individual does not have to go the Deer Park reluctantly but can get enjoyment from going there, as the individual can recognize that the need for such diversions is part of being human, and to acknowledge one's human needs in this way is thus a fitting expression of one's humility in relation to God. However, Kierkegaard then raises the question of how the individual can be sure that on a particular occasion, going to the Deer Park would really satisfy a need, or is just something the person feels inclined to do, as a mere desire or whim. The individual must therefore determine which it is, and one way to do so might be to try to resist going, here expressing their nothingness before God by waiting to see whether this happens to tell them which way to go: if they can resist, that would suggest it was an inclination, whereas if they cannot, that would suggest it is a need. However, things are not that simple, as if the person finds they no longer want to go the Deer Park, this might also be because they are irritated at having to rely on God for such a simple matter. The difficulty thus seems to be this: suppose I see I can successfully hold off going to the Deer Park for another day. What does that tell me? If it tells me that it is not really a need that should be satisfied, then I should not go. But if it tells me that I am being prideful and defiant here, in trying to show how I can rise above my needs and determine for myself when they are to be satisfied, then it is not clear what I should do—as far as my relation to God is concerned, it might be better for me to go than not go, as by willing not to go, I am showing myself capable of acting without God.

Having reached this point, Kierkegaard writes:

But in turn this temptation [spiritual trial: *anfægtelse*]⁹ vanishes, because the religious person is silent, and the person who is silent before God learns to give way, to be sure, but he also learns that this is blessed ... [O]ur religious person ... arrives at the amusement park.¹⁰

Kierkegaard here seems to suggest that the individual expresses their nothingness before God by letting go of this sense of irritation, and turning again to focusing on their relation with God, which means that the irritation vanishes; and once it does, this will enable the person to determine whether they should go to the Deer Park or not, by simply acting in a way that embodies their trust in God.

⁹ This is a notion that Kierkegaard takes over from Luther, and the latter's conception of *Anfechtungen*. For further discussion, see Simon D. Podmore, *Struggling with God: Kierkegaard and the Temptation of Spiritual Trial* (London: James Clarke, 2013).

¹⁰ SKS 7: 450/KW 12.1: 496–7. Cf. Ecclesiastes 5: 1–2: 'Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.'

Curiously, perhaps, Løgstrup's analysis follows Kierkegaard's discussion closely up until this last step, which he does not mention explicitly. But this is probably because Løgstrup would not see it as the solution to the problem, but a manifestation of it, as it is left obscure how Kierkegaard thinks the issue is resolved: the person just seems to find themselves in the Deer Park, where it is unclear how this has happened in Kierkegaard's account. And this is Løgstrup's fundamental worry: given the way Kierkegaard sets things up, there is no way to bring 'this circling of self-observation to a halt, nothing that can interrupt this cycle of worry, dissolution of worry and renewal of worry' (41/58).

Løgstrup does however mention the final step in Kierkegaard's account: having decided to go to the Deer Park, what is to prevent the individual raising all the previous concerns—namely that they are here just giving in to a whim and inclination, and not doing something of which God would approve, or not acting on a genuine need? Kierkegaard suggests that these worries can be disarmed now that the decision has been made—though on ethical grounds, not religious ones: namely, 'in the face of a decision taken on the basis of honest deliberation, a fleeting thought must not play lord and master', where

[t]he ethical consideration is quite simply this, that when the worst comes to the worst it is worse to become maundering [a driveller, someone who rambles: *vrølevorn*] than with decisiveness to carry out what has been decided, which perhaps was less properly considered, because maundering is the absolute downfall of every spiritual relationship.¹¹

Løgstrup implies but does not explicitly state that he sees this move by Kierkegaard as an option he is not entitled to take, but one into which he is forced by the difficulties of his position.

Løgstrup also makes an important comment at this point, which hints at the core of the critique of Kierkegaard that forms the basis for the second part of the book, from Chapter 6 onwards:

The difficulty derives not only from what Kierkegaard calls the sickness of human beings {namely their weakness}, but it also has a logical character. The difficulty may be due to the fact that the infinite demand for Kierkegaard does not have a determinate content, in the face of which the human being fails and before which they recognize themselves as nothing, but instead purely abstractly aims for the goal that the human being recognizes themselves as nothing. (41/58)¹²

¹¹ SKS 7: 450/KW 12.1: 497.

¹² See the comment on this paragraph in the Editor's Notes below, as it is puzzling here that Løgstrup uses a rather tentative 'may' at the start of the second sentence, as a more definite 'is' would seem to be more appropriate.

As this suggests, for Løgstrup a fundamental problem with Kierkegaard's position is the contentlessness and hence formalism of the infinite demand as Kierkegaard conceives it, which means that the issue of the Deer Park cannot be resolved. At this stage, however, Løgstrup postpones further analysis of the issue until he has discussed Kierkegaard's conception of guilt in the next chapter, at which point Heidegger is brought back into the discussion.

2.5 Kierkegaard and Heidegger on guilt

The issue of guilt is relevant to Løgstrup, as this is another important way in which he thinks Kierkegaard presents the relation between our concrete existence and the infinite demand, while also showing how the latter marks a break with life in the crowd and our ordinary social norms. Under these norms, guilt is essentially a quantitative and external notion, and a matter of one's relation to other individuals: the amount of one's guilt is relatively fixed (for example, by a prison sentence), and whether one is guilty depends on one's external behaviour in relation to those norms, and whether one has violated them in one's relation to other people (for example, by punching someone). This makes this form of guilt a comparative notion, a matter of more or less. By contrast, the guilt that relates to Kierkegaard's infinite demand is qualitative and internal, and concerns one's relation to eternity: the guilt involved is not a question of more or less, but rather is all or nothing, while what causes the guilt is a matter of the individual's very existence, as a finite being. This puts guilt of this kind into the category of 'totality', rather than being merely comparative.

Løgstrup argues that various things follow from this way of thinking. First, 'total' guilt is more fundamental than 'comparative' guilt, for to concern oneself with the latter is to concern oneself with how one stands in relation to other individuals rather than to the infinite and eternal, and so to make oneself more guilty in relation to the latter. Second, Kierkegaard's understanding of total guilt is tied to his understanding of time, as it is partly because of our relation to time that total guilt arises, insofar as we cannot act instantaneously, and so have always delayed doing what we should have done. Third, total guilt is constant, whereas comparative guilt can be forgotten in between particular instances of transgression.

However, Løgstrup suggests, just as the problem Kierkegaard raises in the Deer Park case arises not because of human inadequacy but has a logical structure that makes it unresolvable, so the same holds here: for in the Deer Park example, it was impossible to know whether or not one can go to the Deer Park, while in the case of guilt, it is impossible to know whether or not one should feel guilty. For, just as Kierkegaard allows that God permits us to seek a diversion legitimately

insofar as we are human, but leaves it unclear how we can know if this is the case on any particular occasion, so similarly he allows that God permits us to forget our guilt at times because otherwise life would be intolerable, but without telling us if this is permitted in any particular case. As a result, we start to feel guilty for not feeling guilty, so that in this totalized form, guilt comes to feed off itself. Thus, in this issue of guilt, Løgstrup thinks that Kierkegaard addresses the question raised by his philosophy as a whole, but in a problematic way that is explored further in the second part: namely how 'concrete existence is penetrated by its relation to infinity and eternity' (46/64).

Løgstrup now turns to Heidegger, having noted previously (as we saw) that he raises an analogous question with respect to death, though (Løgstrup claims) it plays a less fundamental role in his thinking than it does in Kierkegaard's (cf. 31/46), which is why Løgstrup gives it somewhat less discussion. Like Kierkegaard, Løgstrup argues, Heidegger recognizes that the answer cannot be to escape from life in society altogether; instead, it consists in taking on individual responsibility for how one lives in this social world. Similarly, Heidegger addresses the problem of how the individual can live their life as one of becoming and possibility, which he seeks to resolve through his conception of a decision as something that does not bind the individual forever, but which requires constant repetition, even if what is decided is the same. Løgstrup therefore suggests that the parallel between Heidegger and Kierkegaard in these respects means that the former's view can be translated into the latter's terminology, where death becomes an absolute end while what is actualized in life is seen as merely relative.

Løgstrup sees a further parallel in their respective treatments of guilt. Like Kierkegaard, Løgstrup argues, Heidegger draws a distinction between guilt in an ethical or judicial sense, which is a failure to live up to some objective norm, and guilt in a more fundamental sense, which relates to the individual's existence. In Heidegger's case, this arises out of his conception of 'care', where on the one hand we are not the ground of our own existence, but on the other hand we must take on responsibility for everything we are and do, but where in acting we always leave something else undone. However, guilt of this sort only becomes clear to us insofar as we orientate ourselves towards death in the right way, otherwise only the lesser form of guilt will be apparent to us. Nonetheless, life in the crowd will draw us into this merely comparative form of guilt, from which conscience can pull us back, as we feel guilt for simply existing. Thus, Løgstrup suggests, both Kierkegaard and Heidegger draw similar distinctions between forms of guilt, and make guilt in its fundamental form inescapable, but while Heidegger gives this a purely ontological basis, for Kierkegaard it takes an ethical form in relation to an infinite demand.

2.6 *Løgstrup's critique*

Having laid out their respective positions, and drawn out various significant parallels but also differences, Løgstrup now turns in the second part of his book to a more critical discussion of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, beginning in Chapter 6 with Kierkegaard and his conception of the infinite demand. As Løgstrup has already hinted in his discussion of the Deer Park and of Kierkegaard's treatment of guilt, his central concern is that the abstractness of the demand as Kierkegaard conceives it makes it logically impossible to connect this to concrete existence: 'the abyss is posited through an abstraction, and therefore we stand before a task that is impossible in principle and logically, to take over our own individual existence' (55/73). Løgstrup argues that Kierkegaard's demand remains abstract because he tries to derive content from form: namely, to derive its content from the fact that it is infinite, where this means that its aim is for the finite to know that it is nothing. To this extent, Løgstrup suggests, Kierkegaard's procedure resembles Kant's, who likewise tries to derive the content of the moral law from the form of its universality.

Løgstrup argues that this then sets up an absolute opposition between the infinite demand and the finite demands of ordinary social norms, so that Kierkegaard makes it impossible for them to relate to one another, as the sense of guilt and responsibility are radically different in both. Likewise, insofar as the infinite demand comes from God and is seen as religious, and the finite demands come from society and are seen as ethical, on Kierkegaard's account 'the ethical and the religious slip away from one another', as 'the ethical is reduced to becoming the mere occasion for religious life' (57/75). More specifically, rather than seeing guilt and responsibility as a matter of the relation between two parties or human beings, one who has committed wrong and one who has suffered wrong, they become instead a matter of the person's relation to God, so that the other person 'against whom wrong has been committed, is completely eliminated': 'Once the person against whom the wrong has been committed has established a religious relation between the guilty person and the infinite demand or God, they slip completely out of the picture' (57/75). The demand 'aims exclusively at the annihilation of the individual before God' (57/75) rather than telling us how we should relate to our fellow human beings, who thus become irrelevant, as the ethical relation between one human being and another becomes the religious relation between the human being and God. Likewise, guilt is transformed from guilt at transgressing one's relation to other people, to guilt at failing to be nothing before God; this then becomes guilt at failing to feel

properly guilty, which is consequently a guilt that lives off itself rather than being connected to any particular content.

Having expressed this criticism of Kierkegaard's position, Løgstrup then asks whether we can do any better: can we have a conception of an infinite demand that is somehow distinct from our ordinary social norms, that is nonetheless less abstract and empty than Kierkegaard's conception? Løgstrup now goes on to suggest that we can find a middle way here, in a manner that is significant for the later development of his views in *The Ethical Demand* and beyond.

Løgstrup begins by characterizing the ordinary norms of social life, which give us the right to make certain demands¹³ of one another that are more or less determinate and more or less articulable: for example, the demands a student can make of me as a teacher, or that a child or spouse can make of me as a family member, or an individual can make of me as a fellow citizen. Such norms thus involve demands that the individuals have a right to impose on each other, and it will be relatively clearly established what they require of us, even though particular cases may still call for some exercise of practical judgement. Likewise, such norms are enforced through a system of sanctions and penalties, even if this is just a matter of public disapproval. However, Løgstrup argues, there is another kind of demand that is very different from these sorts of demand, as it goes beyond what a person has a rightful claim to make, and is not to be specified in the manner of the social norms, while lacking any clear mechanism of social sanction to enforce it. Thus, whereas the social norms come about through some system of tacit agreement or contract, this demand has its roots in the bare existence of the other person, prior to any such social framework. Løgstrup's conception of this second sort of demand is laid out in this important paragraph:

But there is also a demand that exceeds what the other person may legitimately demand. It is not a demand that can be verified, as the previous one can, or that announces itself violently as punishment for whoever is not willing to comply. By contrast, it is a demand whose existence can only be asserted, proclaimed and taken up. It neither has its origins in the norms of social life, nor is it conditioned through them; rather it is given with the existence of the other person themselves. It therefore does not specify in greater or lesser detail what I ought to do. Just as the demand is given with the bare existence of the other, so is it correspondingly directed at me in my bare existence. (59/78)

¹³ Later, in *The Ethical Demand*, Løgstrup develops a more consistent terminology where he speaks of a social norm of this sort as a '*krav*', which while it can be translated as 'demand' can also be translated as 'requirement' or 'claim', and *fording* (or *Forderung* in German) is used for the ethical demand.

A demand of this sort, Løgstrup suggests, is not one that I can follow in a spirit of self-interest, as I might follow ordinary social norms (for example, to avoid the punishment that comes with their transgression); rather, what is demanded of me here is to act in service of the other person, and not because I will benefit in some way by doing so, or avoid some sort of social cost.

Now of course, Løgstrup's distinction between these two sorts of demand in important ways resembles the distinctions that Kierkegaard and Heidegger have also drawn. But Løgstrup wants to argue that his view is still significantly different, as he thinks to 'hear such a demand', the individual does not have to 'abstract infinitely from their concrete existence'; on the contrary, he argues, the individual 'hears the demand *in* their concrete existence' (59/78, my emphasis). This is so, Løgstrup suggests, insofar as the individual is responsible for the other, which precisely means acting for their sake, but in a way that is not predefined by the prevailing social norms. Thus, the demand has content insofar as it is set by how this responsibility to the other is best discharged, but this is not to be equated with or read off what the social norms may tell us about the situation.

Løgstrup now considers in more detail how this relation of responsibility is to be understood, and how it differs from our responsibility involving social norms. Slightly earlier, Løgstrup had characterized Kierkegaard as holding that the ethical and religious relation is a two-place connection, either between one human being and another in the former case, or God and the individual human being in the latter, as one party to the relation imposes the demand on the other side through their authority over the latter (cf. 57/75–6). Now, however, he argues that responsibility involves a three-place relation:

Responsibility is never only a relation between two; each relation of responsibility is a relation between three. To be responsible is to have responsibility for an other and equally to be responsible to a third. We have the responsible person, the person for whom the responsible person has responsibility, and also, to put it briefly, the authority.¹⁴ That which—or who—says 'you shall [*sollst*]' to the responsible person is not primarily the one for whom the responsible person has the responsibility, but rather the one to whom the responsible person is responsible—namely the authority. So for example children, for whom parents have responsibility, are precisely not those to whom parents are responsible. (60/79–80)

Once again, Løgstrup distinguishes between the case of social norms, and the case of the infinite demand, this time in connection with how this three-place relation operates. In the case of social norms, the authority in question comes from the

¹⁴ See the Translator's Preface for further discussion of the term used here, which is *Instanz* in German, or *instans* in Danish.

norms of social life, to which the person is responsible; but here, this means that the other person for whom one is responsible can equally speak for this authority, as it is constituted as an authority through agreement between persons. The result is therefore that the other person *for whom* one is responsible can also be the person *to whom* one is responsible. The situation is different, Løgstrup argues, in the case of the infinite demand, for he has already claimed that the person for whom one is responsible has no right to make the demand, and it is not based on any contractual process, so that the individual cannot make you responsible *to* them in the same way, even though you are responsible *for* them:

The other, for whom I have responsibility, cannot here identify themselves with the authority, in such a way that the authority and their own 'you shall' directed to me then coincide. Neither can they appeal to any community, that is given with social life and without which neither their nor my life could exist. (61/81)

The question then arises, in the case of the infinite demand, how the third element in the relation—that *to* which the responsible person is responsible—is to be conceived.

Now, in an earlier text entitled 'The Anthropology of Kant's Ethics' (1947), Løgstrup explicitly identifies this third element with God as creator:

This does not mean that the law comes from the other person for whom the responsible person is responsible, for it is characteristic of responsibility that it is a two-sided relation. To be responsible is (a) to have responsibility for a second person and (b) to be responsible to a third person. The law comes from the one *to* whom the responsible person is responsible. And to the question: 'Who is this person?' the answer is that it is the creator who has created human beings such that their nature is an ordered nature in the sense that they have been created to live in ordinances in which they are bound to the others in responsibility.

The one who says to the responsible person: 'You shall', is not the one for whom the responsible person is responsible, but the one *to* whom the responsible person is responsible. For example, when Luther says that parents in relation to their children are in God's stead, the parents are those who are responsible, the children those for whom they are responsible, and God is the one to whom the parents are responsible for how they have acted in their responsibility for their children. But the children for whom the parents are responsible are certainly not those to whom the parents are responsible.¹⁵

However, in the Berlin lectures we are discussing, and also arguably in *The Ethical Demand* itself and in later works, Løgstrup is much less theologically

¹⁵ 'The Anthropology of Kant's Ethics', pp. 31–2.

explicit in what he says, leaving matters more open-ended in a way that is presumably intentional.¹⁶

In fact, having said that the responsibility is a relation between three, Løgstrup initially says nothing about this 'third' at all, but instead first emphasizes how this kind of responsibility is different from that involved in social norms, in a way that differentiates it from 'life in the crowd'. For, firstly, the authority in question here is not that of the community, and secondly in order to discharge this responsibility, one cannot simply do what the other asks, so one retains responsibility for what happens for oneself, rather than passing it on to someone else. To do the latter 'would be the same as going under in the crowd, although the crowd in this case would be only *one* other human being' (62/82).¹⁷ Rather, Løgstrup suggests, the responsibility associated with the infinite demand *isolates* the individual in question, as they are forced to think for themselves how best to respond to the needs of the other person, in a way that properly individuates them: 'In the highest concrete existence of responsibility the individual is made into an individual, isolated in the ethical sense because the demand is absolute' (62/82).

It is now at this point that Løgstrup returns to the claim that 'the responsibility relation is thereby expressed as a relation between three', where he writes as follows: 'Responsibility isolates the responsible person in an ethical way, in that it confronts them with the authority as the infinite demand' (62/82). Put this way, it seems, the 'third' element in the relation—that to which the responsible person is responsible—is not God the creator, but the demand itself, which exercises its own authority over the person, an authority which is not to be identified with the person for whom they are responsible, as would be the case if the demand were grounded in a social norm. I thus have responsibility to act in a way that does not devolve to the person for whom I am responsible, but no more needs to be said about this third place in the relation than that, as this is just what it is to be under an infinite demand which holds me to account.¹⁸

The crucial point that Løgstrup then makes, in the context of his debate with Kierkegaard in particular, is that this infinite demand can be distinguished from the finite demands of social life not just by its form, but also by its *content*: for under the infinite demand, I am responsible for the other in a different way from the demands of social life, as it goes beyond what these require of me, and in so

¹⁶ For further discussion of this issue, see Robert Stern, *The Radical Demand in Løgstrup's Ethics*, pp. 188–9.

¹⁷ Cf. a similar comment made in *The Ethical Demand*, p. 20/p. 32.

¹⁸ This idea is further developed in *The Ethical Demand*, Chapter 10, §§1–2.

doing how I relate to the other. In the case of the infinite demand, but not our social demands,

[t]he content is responsibility itself in its totality: the responsibility that everything in the relation to the other human being, for which the responsible person has responsibility, is brought about in words and deeds, and these words and deeds have to be said and done for the sake of the other and not for one's own sake. (62/83)

In this way, Løgstrup argues, his position differs fundamentally from what he takes to be the formalism of both Kant and Kierkegaard:

It is therefore—to use Kant's terminology—a universal law, but without being, as with Kant, formal—for it is material. It has a highly concrete content.

It is—to apply Kierkegaard's terminology—an infinite demand; but not a demand that announces itself first in an exclusively religious relation of infinite abstraction from concrete existence, and that therefore has no concrete content. On the contrary, it is that which as infinite demand in the responsibility relation announces its concrete existence as a contentful demand. (62–3/83)

Løgstrup thus claims to have found a conception of the ethical that is both contentful on the one hand, and on the other is still recognizably distinct from the content which is given to ethics by social norms, thus avoiding the problems of the formalism he associates with Kant and Kierkegaard (as raised in the discussion of the trip to the Deer Park, for example), but still finding a conception of the ethical that is distinct from 'life in the crowd' with its social norms.

Similarly, Løgstrup argues that he has found a middle way in connection with the conception of guilt put forward by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, which he had criticized previously. For, he argues, the guilt associated with the infinite demand as he conceives it is still different from the comparative and quantitative guilt that comes with social norms, while avoiding the hyperbolic nature of guilt as understood by Kierkegaard and Heidegger—where in both cases, Løgstrup's ethical charge is that in their one-sided response to the problem, these two thinkers fail to see guilt as grounded in the relation between individuals, because they only see that relation in terms of social norms and not the infinite demand. Heidegger thus makes guilt an ontological phenomenon, while Kierkegaard makes it a religious one. Nonetheless, Løgstrup argues, conceived of as an infinite demand, it can be understood as capturing our existence as becoming and possibility, as the demand is such that one can never be sure that it has been fully discharged and realized, so that in this way the desiderata imposed on any successful account by Kierkegaard and Heidegger can still be met, but without succumbing to their empty and extreme conception of guilt in its totalized form.

Løgstrup now considers in some further detail how the finite and infinite demands differ from one another.¹⁹ He argues it would be too simplistic to suggest that the latter require reflection while the former can be followed blindly, as even to apply a finite demand or social norm may require some thought and so draw the individual into the action—for example, as a teacher the social norms will only set some fairly general parameters, beyond which I will still need to engage myself in determining how to act. Similarly, the social norms may require as much sacrifice as does the infinite demand, as in certain situations I might be required to give up my life, for example in times of war. Nonetheless, the content of the infinite demand will not be fixed by broad social roles but by the needs of the other person understood independently of those roles, while my sacrifice will not be made worthwhile in social terms, for example through the memorials set up for me after my death. A radical difference thus still remains.

This implies, Løgstrup argues, that the basis of the two sets of norms is very different. As we have seen, Løgstrup holds that the social norms get their normativity in a broadly contractual manner, through some sort of implicit or explicit agreement between individuals. However, the responsibility relations reflected in the infinite demand are ‘always already’ there; they are not norms we construct for ourselves, but are given with and by the nature of human existence in the world: ‘Our nature is ordered, its order is determined for our life with and against one another; we are as it were forced on each other in a way that makes us responsible’ (66/88).²⁰ Thus, while the social norms are variable and changeable, as different practices come to be agreed and instituted (for example, norms surrounding marriage), the relations of responsibility associated with the infinite demand do not change; rather, this ‘is given with the natural basis and the culturally shaped relations themselves and imposes itself on us with necessity. These are laws that must be respected if we want to live in and adhere to the order of things’ (66/88). Likewise, social norms can be investigated to see if they are working as they were designed by us to function, or whether they should be changed in the light of changing social conditions, in a way that the relations of responsibility cannot.

Having drawn this distinction between these two kinds of norms, Løgstrup nonetheless insists that they are not entirely separate from one another, such that

¹⁹ This discussion is developed further in *The Ethical Demand*, Chapter 3, §§5–6.

²⁰ Løgstrup’s reference to ‘orders’ here is a reference back to Luther, which was also discussed in his earlier essay ‘The Anthropology of Kant’s Ethics’. For further discussion, see Kees van Kooten Niekerk’s introduction to his translation of that essay in Hans Fink and Robert Stern (eds), *What Is Ethically Demanded? K. E. Løgstrup’s Philosophy of Moral Life* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2017), pp. 19–23.

no relation between them exists. For, while the care of the other that is required by the infinite demand is distinctive, and in deciding to adopt this approach one to some extent steps outside the social norms, nonetheless in many cases what best serves the other will require us to take those norms into account, for whether the other's life goes well or badly will in large part be determined by the norms that prevail. So, for example, in responding responsibly to the needs of another person in our society, I would be wrong not to take some account of how sexual relations, property, employment, and so on are structured, in terms of their respective social norms, as the individual's relation to these spheres of activity are likely to be crucial to their well-being. However, this does not mean I can just switch to the opposite extreme, and go along with whatever these norms happen to suggest. I must thus remain sensitive to the difference between these two levels, and the possibility of tension between them, even while taking both into account.

Løgstrup thus holds that on his account, there is nothing that logically prevents the individual from caring for the other person, which he argued was a problem with Kierkegaard's position, as this care becomes replaced by the relation to God. On the other hand, he thinks he can still accommodate part of Kierkegaard's point, namely that we can never be sure that someone has genuinely responded to the other with care, not because it is impossible to do so, but because we can never be sure about *why* we have acted, both in our own case and that of others; thus what looks like care for the other may be closer to self-interest or just obedience to norms than it appears—and the more an individual insists that it is the former and not the latter, the more suspicious their motivations become. Løgstrup thus accepts that there is an important element of 'inwardness' in our relation to the infinite demand, just as Kierkegaard claims that there is in our relation to God.

In this important chapter, therefore, Løgstrup has built on the criticisms he thinks he can offer of Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's positions, in such a way as to incorporate much of what they are after but within a more stable position of his own—thus finding a middle way between life in the crowd on the one hand, and what he sees as the empty abstractions of Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the other, where this middle way is made possible for Løgstrup by his own, more contentful, conception of the infinite demand. Thus, many key Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian concerns are incorporated into Løgstrup's position—such as responsibility, becoming, guilt, isolation, inwardness, and uncertainty—but in such a way that this position then is said not to face the difficulties generated by the formalism of his opponents, who think this formalism is the only alternative to the kind of content one finds in the social norms. Against this, Løgstrup has argued, there is a different form of content to be found in the relations of

responsibility he identifies with the infinite demand, which relates us to the other in an ethical way, but not in a manner that can be reduced to that of social norms and life in the crowd. Løgstrup's project thus suggests that the Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian might be able to achieve the critique of that life which they were after, but without facing the kind of incoherence which (Løgstrup claims) their more extreme views must generate.

2.7 *Philosophy and proclamation*

In the next chapter, Løgstrup turns to what may look like a rather different issue, and certainly one likely to be relatively unfamiliar (at least to a philosophical audience); but it nonetheless relates deeply to the themes discussed so far, and plays a significant role in his work more generally, both before these lectures and subsequently, particularly in *The Ethical Demand*.²¹ The issue concerns the nature of 'proclamation', a term with little general resonance in English but which is the translation for the German term 'Verkündigung' or the Danish 'forkyndelse', which in both languages is a much more usual word, but which can have a more narrow theological use. In the context in which Løgstrup was writing, it was also closely associated with the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann, and his conception of 'kerygma', where Bultmann had distinguished between hearing the Word of God as a neutral or objective report on the one hand, and on the other as a call addressed to the individual directly, based on some authority, which thus represents a form of faith that goes beyond any grounding it could be given in philosophy or history. In addition, Bultmann and Heidegger were colleagues in Marburg from 1923 to 1928, and they had used the idea of the proclamation to characterize the divide between the theological and philosophical branches of existentialism. The question Løgstrup's chapter addresses, therefore, is how Kierkegaard and Heidegger see the relation between proclamation and philosophy, and thus between theology and philosophy in their work, where here Løgstrup will use this discussion to argue that it is a mistake to pull them too far apart.

Løgstrup begins the chapter by contrasting the views of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, as he understands them. For Kierkegaard, he argues, his account of the ethical demand belongs within philosophy, while for Heidegger it lies outside philosophy in proclamation. However, Løgstrup suggests, Kierkegaard is only

²¹ See, for example, *The Ethical Demand*, Introduction and Chapter 12, as well as an essay that was published the year before these lectures: 'The Category and the Office of Proclamation, with Particular Reference to Luther and Kierkegaard'.

able to avoid Heidegger's alternative by treating the infinite demand as empty, and thus locating it 'inside' the structure of existence in a purely formal manner. We thus seem to be faced with a difficult choice: either make the demand contentful, but then treat it as a proclamation which lies outside philosophy (Heidegger), or bring the demand within philosophy, but treat it as empty (Kierkegaard). Having set up these alternatives, in the rest of the chapter Løgstrup again considers whether some middle way can be found.

Løgstrup starts by questioning some assumptions on which the contrast between proclamation and philosophy are drawn. A first assumption is that proclamation relates to content, while philosophy relates to form. A second assumption is that proclamation cannot be demonstrated or analysed, and hence is at odds with philosophy. Løgstrup begins by questioning the latter assumption: for while it may be true that a proclamation cannot be established in the manner of some standard philosophical proposition, he argues that it must still be comprehensible or understandable—otherwise, he warns, it would be no more than 'obscure superstition' (74/98), which the believer would have to simply compel themselves to accept. And Løgstrup then argues that to be comprehensible in this way, it must relate in some manner to the formal nature of human existence which then provides some ethical content, hence showing how a middle ground can be found.

Løgstrup illustrates what he has in mind with reference to Kierkegaard, and his conception of Christianity as a 'paradox'. This might look like outright irrationalism, which aims to make Christianity entirely incomprehensible. However, Løgstrup suggests, while clearly a challenge to traditional forms of rationalism which seek to argue for Christianity through purely philosophical means, Kierkegaard's view still allows for the 'paradox' to be made comprehensible in some broader and richer sense, as he nonetheless relates this paradox to the nature of our existence. Philosophy thus makes some demand on the nature of the proclamation, not in the name of reason in some abstract manner, but in the name of existence, as it is by relating to our existence that the proclamation can be made comprehensible to us, no matter how paradoxical it may otherwise be. Thus, Løgstrup argues, though we should not do this merely mechanically, in a suitably sophisticated sense we can use our understanding of existence to provide some constraints on what form any proclamation might take, as a 'trial' or 'test' of the latter.

Building on what he had said previously about Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Løgstrup then suggests that this test should involve four related aspects: does the proclamation leave the individual at the mercy of the crowd or not? Does it enable them to remain true to their existence as becoming and possibility or not?

Does it offer an absolute certainty or instead leave room for the individual to assume their own responsibility? And does it subordinate existence to thought, or vice versa? (See the summary on 79/105.) As we have seen, Løgstrup holds that for these two thinkers, these features are taken up in the way in which the individual relates themselves to what is absolute and radical—in Kierkegaard's case to an infinite demand, and in Heidegger's case to death. This then means that the individual's relation to the absolute and radical is 'invisible', as no one from outside as a 'third' or observer can tell whether the relation has been attained, and likewise the individual can never be certain that they have actualized what is required. Thus, from the perspective of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, we could treat these four features as a 'test' of any proclamation.

As a consequence, Løgstrup argues, a position of this sort cannot subordinate existence to thought, to the extent to which the latter provides clear and easily applicable rules or principles to apply in any situation, for this would violate the four constraints outlined above, so that the proclamation can never be treated as a mere system of ideas or 'ideology'. This does not mean that the individual can behave *without* thought or entirely thoughtlessly, but must think in a way that recognizes the limits of thought, and so take on individual responsibility for any decision in a fallibilist manner. In this way, insofar as philosophy provides us with an analysis of existence on the one hand, and the proclamation to be comprehensible must relate to that analysis on the other, the two sides turn out to be less far apart than it may initially have appeared.

Løgstrup illustrates what he has in mind here with reference to the key example of the proclamation as it figures in Christianity,²² where he argues that only a 'superficial observer' (79/105) would protest against the analysis of existence being used as a test of the Christian proclamation in this way, while noting that Kierkegaard frequently criticized the teaching of the church on the basis of this analysis. At the same time, Løgstrup allows that the analysis of existence offered by philosophy should not necessarily be taken as authoritative by theology in an uncritical manner: rather, there should be dialogue on this matter. Indeed, he notes, the existential analysis offered by Heidegger has its basis in Luther, Augustine, and even the proclamation of Jesus (75/100). But ultimately, he argues, theology cannot refuse to engage with philosophy, and instead insist on the authority of revelation, as this would be to offer a faith without understanding, which (as he had already suggested) he sees as a form of coercion.

²² As Løgstrup notes earlier (73/97), a proclamation need not just be considered in a religious context, but also in an ethical and political one, where he later mentions communism as a specific instance (84/112).

As a result, Løgstrup argues, the Christian proclamation cannot be used directly as the basis for a political position, as this would be to precisely try to make its content certain in a way that would violate the test suggested by Kierkegaard and Heidegger: an outsider would be able to tell whether or not a person related properly to the Christian message by succeeding or failing to grasp it, and the person would simply have to actualize what it requires, without taking any individual responsibility. Both Christianity and the individual Christian thus find themselves ossified, the former into an ideology and the latter into a person who just does what the political programme demands—in short, they become part of life in the crowd. And once this happens, those who take their political views to be based on Christian authority will hold that they have greater knowledge than non-Christians, which gives them a right to impose their views on others—whereas, Løgstrup argues, while care for the other in the ethical situation means one does not simply do what they ask, at the same time one must remain open to correction in the light of their views, and not take on oneself the responsibility that the other has for themselves. Thus, Løgstrup claims, unless we respect the limits he has suggested on the Christian proclamation as a political programme, it will quickly lead to encroachment by individuals into the lives of others, which he claims his own approach is able to avoid.²³

2.8 *Thought versus existence*

In this chapter, one underlying theme has been the relation between thought and existence: as a result of thinking, should we try to come up with a set of rules or procedures which simply have to be actualized and applied in an incontrovertible manner that can provide us with certainty, and thus the right to impose such rules on others, thereby subordinating existence to thought? Or must some limit to thinking be recognized, so that some degree of individual responsibility, fallibilism, and open-endedness must be acknowledged in however we decide to act, without at the same time succumbing to thoughtlessness and outright irrationalism which would subordinate existence to thought in the wrong way? In a brief final chapter, Løgstrup considers this issue in relation to Kierkegaard.

Løgstrup argues that Kierkegaard saw a clear tension here between thought and existence, insofar as he held that '[t]o think is to abstract from existence and the infinite interest of the individual in existence' (86/115). As Løgstrup notes, Kierkegaard formulated this issue in various ways: for example, as the contrast

²³ This theme also comes through strongly in *The Ethical Demand*, particularly Chapter 5, §2, and is also a theme in other writings such as the essay 'Humanism and Christianity' which was published in the same year as these lectures.

between the universal and the particular; between disinterestedness and interest; and atemporality and temporality. At the same time, Løgstrup argues, Kierkegaard was not suggesting that thinking simply be abandoned when it comes to existence, as this is itself to think in too abstract a way—as a matter of all or nothing. On the contrary, thinking must acknowledge and learn to live with an irresolvable tension here, which will precisely give rise to the kind of movement and becoming which Løgstrup has suggested is essential to the analysis of existence offered by Kierkegaard, and which must be made fundamental to a truly philosophical conception of thinking, which no longer seeks to impose itself on existence, but to remain open to it.

Taken as a whole, therefore, these lectures provide a penetrating and distinctive response to the work of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, not only in the criticisms they raise, but also in the way those criticisms point the way forward to Løgstrup's own positive position.²⁴ Overall, it is clear that while Løgstrup deeply sympathized with many of Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's concerns, he also felt that in the end their responses to those concerns were inadequate, and it is this that drove him to develop his own middle way, between 'life in the crowd' on the one hand, and on the other what he took to be the empty abstraction of Kierkegaard's emphasis on the infinite demand and Heidegger's emphasis on death. It is this search for a middle way that led Løgstrup to develop his own conception of the ethical demand, which incorporates many features of Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's existential analysis—isolation, authenticity, responsibility, inwardness, and so on—as the individual faces up to the demand and what is required of them, but does so within a more contentful ethical framework that nonetheless stands outside (while relating to) the social norms in which we so often find ourselves submerged. In these lectures, therefore, we find the origins of many of the concerns and positions which were to be developed further in the work by Løgstrup that was yet to come, and on which his important contribution to these issues was to be built.²⁵

²⁴ For some responses to the readings of Kierkegaard and Heidegger that Løgstrup develops here, see the paper by Olesen Larsen referred to earlier, and also other works listed in the Select Bibliography.

²⁵ I am very grateful to David Batho, Bjørn Rabjerg, and Dan Watts for their comments on previous versions of this text.

Foreword

What follows consists in eight lectures that were given in January 1950 at the Free University of Berlin, without any substantial changes. It falls into two parts. The first five chapters take the form of a presentation and interpretation. Here there is partly an attempt to bring into clear focus some of the main features of Kierkegaard's understanding of existence, and partly to draw out the similarity and difference between Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's thought.

The final chapters take a stance on what has gone before. Kierkegaard's view of the infinite demand, as it is given in his understanding of existence, is criticized. The problem of the relationship between the analysis of existence and proclamation is posed on the basis of the philosophy of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Finally, Kierkegaard's problem of the relation between thought and existence is dealt with.

1

Kierkegaard and Heidegger on 'Life in the Crowd'

[9/9] An opposition that one is always confronted with in engaging with Kierkegaard's work, and which appears to permeate his thought completely, expresses itself in the alternatives of either living as an individual, or going under in the crowd.

He understands by the latter an existence in which the human being, 'instead of being a self, has become a number, one more human being, one more repetition in the eternal sameness'. This is to allow 'the self to be defrauded by the others'.ⁱ The human forgets 'whatⁱⁱ they are called by God', and finds it risky 'to be themselves, and much easier and safer to be, as the others are, an aping, just a number in the crowd'. That is, to become 'polished smooth as a pebble, circulated like a well-used coin' (*The Sickness unto Death*, SKS 11: 150/KW 19: 33–4).

How can it have come to this? This happens because human beings are wholly imprisoned by temporal and worldly interests. Going under in the crowd presupposes that the human being in their wishes, desires, pleasure, and suffering is bound to the earthly in an immediate way, in which their whole life goes on. Or, as it is put in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, it presupposes that a human being in this immediacy [10] puts themselves in an absolute relation only to relative ends. A human being who lives their life wholly inside the temporal and the worldly cannot but go under in the crowd, because the temporal and the worldly [10], in which their whole life is played out, is the manifold. Being occupied with this divides and disperses the human being, they lose their self to the crowd! Losing themselves in occupation with the earthly in its manifoldness, and thus losing themselves in this scatterbrainedness, means that the human being loses themselves to the others, because they occupy themselves with things in the same manner as the others do. All the human being's thoughts, words, and deeds that make up this occupation are determined by the others.

Kierkegaard characterizes this life in different ways. One determination that appears continuously is 'busyness'. Being occupied does not become 'busyness' first and foremost through the type of temperament with which a human being engages in things, but rather through the object with which one is occupied, namely when this is the manifold. It is put this way in *Works of Love*: 'To be busy is to occupy oneself with all that is manifold in a divided and dispersed way (which follows from the object with which one is occupied)' [SKS 9: 103/KW 16: 98]. 'Busyness' is therefore not a psychological determination for Kierkegaard: a human being can engage in their occupation with the manifold very well in complete tranquillity; it does not need to express itself in a frantic pursuit. Thus Kierkegaard speaks not only of a restless busyness, but also of an inert one (SKS 11: 143/KW 19: 27).

But from this it now follows that one can never make a proper decision in this life. That decision, which is essentially only to be found in the individual, is sought after outside the self, 'in the opinion of the social environment, in public opinion, in village gossip'. Or, in other words, a human being cannot here ever act in an ethical [11] sense. For action in a real sense, *sensu eminenti*, which we will deal with later, is the inner action of the decision. However, in that life of which we are speaking here, there is only action without any decision, that is an action whose only point is that something in a superficial sense is accomplished—action *sensu laxiori*—as an undertaking.

A further characteristic of such a life is the making of comparisons between oneself and others. [11] For to give oneself up to the crowd, to be only one human being more, to become an aping, certainly does not mean being just like others in a superficial sense, and not to want to be different oneself; it need not consist in hiding oneself in the crowd, and in eschewing one-upmanship. On the contrary, what giving oneself up to the crowd normally amounts to, in a superficial sense, is wanting to be different from others, and—if possible—raising oneself above others. But is that not a contradiction? How can a human being in their difference from the crowd go under in the crowd? Kierkegaard responds in this way: that can happen to them, and that does happen to them, when they live in comparing themselves with others! Precisely in their intention to be different from others, a human being allows others to cheat themselves out of themselves, because it is the others who provide the standard of comparison, in which the difference is stated. Whatever the outcome of this comparison, either through my rising above others or through being degraded before others, my life is given up to the others; for they provide the standard, which I accept without further ado. In the eventual elevation over others, despite this the others remain the masters of my life; for they determine it through the process of comparison.

To be nothing more than what one is in comparison with others causes unbearable worry,ⁱⁱⁱ whether one is placed higher or lower than them. If one is placed low, the worry that follows is directed at becoming something in the world; [12] if one is placed high, the worry is directed at climbing even higher in an ever mounting anxiety of falling yet further. In the *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard has described the worry of both degradation {inferiority} and elevation {superiority}. Simply being a human being is not enough; this would be pointless; for in 'being a human being' one cannot compare oneself with others and show off in front of others—as one can for example by 'being a privy counsellor' [SKS 10: 48–68/KW 17: 37–60].

Giving oneself up to the crowd in the act of comparison means to fanaticize, to live in the fantasy that one can only come to clarity concerning [12] how the individual is in themselves through taking the detour of knowing how the others are. This is tantamount to not wanting to know anything more of oneself than what one is in the relation of comparison to the others. In this way, a human being never becomes themselves, but distances themselves ever further from themselves. A human being can know from others only what and who the others are, but never who the human being is themselves. Added to this, it is even more foolish to want to get knowledge of who oneself is from others, as the others do not even know who they themselves are, because others only themselves know what the others are. As Heidegger puts it: 'one' is 'no one'.^{iv}

In close connection with what has just been outlined lies a new characteristic: this life is a life of fanciful imaginings. Giving oneself up to the crowd, to social life, leads to illusion. There is 'nothing so social as to lose oneself' [SKS 9: 127/KW 16: 124]. To give just one single example of this, which Kierkegaard frequently returns to in *Works of Love*: social life (life bound by communal ties) consists, among other things, in an imagining of what love is. Seen from the perspective of the communal bond, self-love is the—by the way relatively rare—phenomenon, of selfishness in splendid isolation, while love is understood as being selfish together with others. After all, life in the communal bond does indeed demand devotion and perhaps even sacrifice, [13] and the world gives itself up to that particular illusion that this is love, without noticing that the cause or the human beings to which the individual makes their sacrifice also belong to the individual's own world. For example, when parents sacrifice themselves for their children, one readily calls it love, merely because one can talk here of sacrifice, without being prepared to see that the children for whom the sacrifice is made ultimately belong to the parent's *own* world in the most extreme sense. This imagining corresponds to the fact that the human being lives their life in a communal bond.

It is furthermore true of life in the crowd that everything a human beings says or does here becomes ambiguous. In spiritlessness, in contrast [13] to the immediacy of innocence, there is indeed a relation to spirit. 'Spiritlessness can therefore to a certain extent contain the whole content of spirit, yet not as spirit, but as spectre, twaddle, cliché and so on. It can contain the truth, but mark you, not as truth, but as rumour and tittle-tattle' (*Concept of Anxiety*, SKS 4: 397/KW 8: 94). If one wants to give a representation of spiritlessness, one must beware of giving the impression that everything that is said by the spiritless person is nonsense. For then spiritlessness would be unambiguous, and that is precisely not the case. 'Spiritlessness can then say exactly what the cleverest spirit says, although not by virtue of spirit. The human being, characterized as spiritless, has just become a speech-machine, and nothing prevents them from learning equally well by heart a philosophical platitude, an article of faith or a political discourse' [SKS 4: 398/KW 8: 95].

If one now draws the conclusion from this, that indeed a difference between spirit and spiritlessness can scarcely be made out, one could say—going by external appearances—that in fact this is not the case. 'There is only one proof that spirit is present, that is the proof of spirit in oneself' [ibid]. And anyone who demands another and thereby external proof [14] is thereby already spiritless (*The Concept of Anxiety*).

Concerning ethics, it thus goes without saying that the ethical is shifted into the external, namely into tradition and custom. Tradition and custom become in the immediacy and in the 'external directedness' of this existence the only measure of what is good and evil.

Tradition and custom are something completely different from something uniform. To seek the source of ethics there, means that one sets aside the ethical in a manifold of isolated determinations and duties. Accordingly, the good then exists only in single, broken-off, good deeds, just as evil only exists in single, broken-off, bad deeds, broken off, that is, from the human beings themselves; for when the decisive measure of good and evil is not found in the human beings themselves, but on the contrary—outside them—in tradition and custom, then the judgement of the deed as good and evil simultaneously consists in detaching the deed from the human being themselves. [14]

The opposition between life as an individual or going under in the crowd plays as important a role in Heidegger's philosophy as it does in Kierkegaard's. This opposition—as the difference between authentic and inauthentic existence—is to be found throughout Heidegger's thought. His description of what he calls being lost in 'the one' corresponds in a certain respect to the description

Kierkegaard gives of life in the crowd. One could say that the two descriptions complement each other.

First of all Heidegger characterizes inauthentic existence as an existence in idle talk. Talking inherently aims at drawing the audience in to the open relation of understanding with respect to the object talked about. Nonetheless talk can be understood without the hearer having to bring themselves into their own [15] original relation of understanding to the object being talked about. How is this possible? After all, it indeed appears out of the question to understand talk, without understanding that which is being talked about, and without thereby being brought to one's own relation to that which is being talked about! However, this can happen because understanding can take two forms. Understanding can be one's own open relation to the object being talked about; or it is the average understanding, that 'one' shares with others and with which one is normally satisfied in the mere superficial listening to talk; it is superfluous to understand for oneself, because from the outset the point is only how 'one' understands it.

Of course the same holds for the person who talks. Where one's own, original appropriation of the object that is spoken about is never attained, or is lost, talk consists only in repeating and parroting; talk turns into idle talk. It only matters that talk happens, which leads to idle talk becoming authoritative in itself. It is as one says it is, just because one says it.

While talk articulates what understanding has discovered and has opened up, idle talk covers and closes up, because it is satisfied with the average understanding in the 'one'. Therefore idle talk suppresses any new questioning and any debate. Through the self-evidence and self-certainty of the human being in idle talk, it remains [15] hidden to the human being how up in the air and groundless their life is.

All of us must keep in view that we grow up in this average interpretation of things, that no one can escape. The human being therefore gains a true understanding and their own grasp of things only in a constant struggle against the official interpretation of things in the 'one'; to position themselves outside this from the outset is impossible.

Idle talk corresponds to curiosity. Idle talk points out to curiosity what one—as it is said—'must read' and [16] 'must see'. They both take each other along and make life a so-called 'intellectually vibrant' life. The curious person is everywhere that idle talk leads them to, and is therefore nowhere.

In the state of curiosity a human being does not see in order thereby to come into their own relation of understanding to the thing being seen, and to dwell there; rather, they see only in order to see. The curious person is interested in knowing something or other, but merely to have known it. {Curiosity is therefore everything but wonder, in which a person precisely does not understand what is

seen.} The new is sought, but only in order to move on, to get on to something else new; that is, the purpose of searching is unrest and excitement. Curiosity seeks distraction in its restlessness.

Idle talk and curiosity make the daily life of human beings with one another ambiguous. It cannot be decided whether real understanding lies behind talk or not. Everything looks as if it is properly understood and yet it is not, or it does not look as if it is and yet it is.^v

The ambiguity is also to be found when one talks about what 'really' has to be done. Everyone has already in advance intimated and felt what the others also intimate and feel. What is of interest is namely only that which interests idle talk and curiosity; and therefore it remains of interest only for as long as one can take part in having an idea of what should be done, without really being bound to do it. When the time comes for implementation, one evades it. For in implementation it is the individual who matters, their commitment and resolution, which must happen in concealment [16] and leaves no place for idle talk or curiosity. But with the help of idle talk concerning what one could also have done, one evades implementation because one had indeed shared in the idea of doing it! Ambiguity passes off the curious idea of that which will happen, and the accompanying idle talk, as if it were the actual event, and stamps actual implementation and the action as consequences of minor significance. [17]

In our life with one another idle talk pushes itself between ourselves and the others; the other is from the beginning what one has heard about them, the idle talk concerning them, and what one knows of them. One keeps an eye on how they behave and what they say to the one and to the other. Our life with one another is everything but a life where each follows their own individual life for themselves alongside the other in mutual indifference. On the contrary, it is a life in which one intently keeps an eye on the other, and where each in all ambiguity listens in on the other.

Having in idle talk and curiosity seen and 'understood' everything, this gives the human being a sense of having unfolded all their possibilities. The self-confidence and resolution, which 'one' has regarding all the things which can be talked about, gradually kills any urge to reach for an understanding through which the individual is brought to their own relation to the matter at hand. Any idea that there should be something that the human being needs to understand and to do under their own steam and at their own risk is completely remote. However, this does not in any way lead to inactivity, as one might think, but rather leads to busyness.

How does this decline into idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity come about? What are its presuppositions? Heidegger's answer is analogous to Kierkegaard's.

A human being cannot live other than in a continuous care over something or other, because a human being is abandoned to themselves. Being given responsibility for themselves, in their existence what matters to the human being is their own existence. First and foremost, the human being is therefore lost in being occupied with things in the world, wherein they are simply abandoned to themselves. In this way they have lost their self, so that they occupy [17] themselves with things and care about something or other, as 'one' occupies oneself with something and cares for it. Losing their self through the character of their existence as care, they fall into the way in which 'one' lives, thinks, works, and talks. [18]

It should be clear that Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's portrayals of life in the crowd or in the 'one' complement one another. Yet there is a difference in principle that has already appeared here, and that will come to light more clearly when we turn to the question of what it means to live as an individual. Kierkegaard's portrayal of spiritless life—which is not to be found thematized in a particular work or a particular place, but throughout, here and there, often only in casual remarks—when it erupts, is fuelled by a strong ethical passion.

It has two grounds. What provokes Kierkegaard to passionate controversy is a form of life that in a decisive respect lies wholly at the same level as life in the crowd, namely speculation. This juxtaposition is surprising. At first sight it appears contradictory that life, which is determined by the perspective of others, should be equated with a life of speculation. Living the life of the crowd in a bourgeois manner on the one hand, and on the other spending a life in speculation, appear to be as far apart as forms of life as one could conceive. Yet for Kierkegaard they are parallel phenomena.

Just to bring out one single point: when the individual loses themselves speculatively in the objective, the result is the same as when the individual gives themselves up to the crowd; namely the good and the bad are uncoupled from human beings themselves. Certainly this happens in totally different ways. In losing oneself to the crowd it happens, as we have seen, through the fact that the ethical is mislaid as custom and tradition; in losing oneself speculatively in the objective, it happens through making the ethical synonymous with what is necessary in a world-historical sense; the ethical is what 'the times require'! But whether it happens in the one way or the other, in both cases the demand will no [18] longer [19] be directed at the individual as a single person, but at the individual as a member of a collective. With the bourgeoisie, custom and tradition make their demand on the individual as a member of the crowd. In the case of speculation, world history—in the Hegelian sense—makes the demand of 'the times' on the individual as a member of a generation.

World-historical necessity is as much outside the individual as custom and tradition, which is why in neither case can the demand be directed at the individual. Kierkegaard here uses the term 'world-historical' because it is a term of Hegel's and of the whole epoch. Today we no longer use the term in this ethically relevant sense; it has come to be applied in an historical way, typically for a past epoch. In order to preserve this perspective, perhaps we must replace 'world historical' with the buzzword of today, namely 'the cultural'. Kierkegaard's concern, translated into our situation, would then be: the ethical cannot be derived from what is necessary in cultural development. But in the same way, speculation cancels the individual as a single person, just as the crowd does in another way. In this respect being a speculative person is along the same lines as being a bourgeois person.

What can be the reason for this? The final presupposition of this parallel is to be found in the nature of thinking as abstract and general, which means that thinking can never grasp the individual or existence. Thinking cannot bring about a relation to the individual and to existence, for this is and remains a matter for existence alone. But if existence lets everything rest on thinking, as happens with the pure thinking of speculation, then the individual is lost in the general and abstract, analogous to its loss in the crowd. (We will set this problem aside for now.) Kierkegaard is provoked by the fact that those who speculate forget [20] that the one who speculates is an existing thing themselves. Not least in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he attacks the Danish Hegelians with wit, sarcasm, and [19] elegant superiority—though behind this, an ethical pathos again and again shows through.

There is a further reason for the passionate tone that marks the comments of Kierkegaard so strongly, which lies in the fact that there is nothing which the crowd in its idle talk cannot pull into its orbit, including Christianity. For Kierkegaard, that is as senseless as can be. If anywhere, it is indeed precisely in Christianity that it is out of the question that the individual can be a part of the crowd. Christianity indeed speaks only to the individual. And Christianity has, as it were, always done what it could to prevent being a Christian being a matter of the crowd. With the paradox, the offence, Christianity confronts the individual with the choice between faith and offence, which the person can only meet as an individual. Nevertheless—in spite of the paradox, in spite of the possibility of offence—people imagine themselves to be Christian precisely as a member of the crowd. They have wholly and completely forgotten that Christianity calls to and engages the individual as such, and have instead made it into a matter of course. How can this possibly have happened? Because people have included Christianity in the temporal and the worldly. Christianity has become a universal tradition, so

that one is Christian just by virtue of living in a geographic part of Christendom. In this way Christianity has come to a self-understanding that is neither aware of the paradox nor the possibility of offence. Here incidentally, without going into it any further, speculation hastens this process. Just as the essential difference between God and the human is annulled in a vulgar way in the streets and alleys, so it is also annulled in a high-minded speculative—and that means pantheistic—way, [21] as Kierkegaard expresses himself in *The Sickness unto Death* (SKS 11: 229/KW 19: 117).

Kierkegaard's fight against this life form is so passionate, because not even Christianity is kept from being turned into tradition and custom, from being taken for granted, due to the fact that the life form of the crowd leaves nothing at all inviolate. [20]

The portrayal of the fall into the 'one' in Heidegger is wholly different. He constantly stresses neutrality towards the ethical, the theological, the life- and world-view, and connectedly the inevitability of this form of life. Words such as 'idle talk', 'curiosity', 'ambiguity', 'fall', and the like are in no way expressions of a negative, disparaging evaluation. They are not put forward in the service of a moralizing criticism. They are purely factual expressions that are used in a purely philosophical analysis of human existence.

However, each statement (or more precisely assertion) with respect to ethics, theology, or life-view must correspond to the structure of human existence that this analysis of existence brings out, if each claim regarding ethics, theology, or life-view is to be comprehensible at all. In the philosophical grounding relation, existential analysis precedes ethics, theology, and life-view, even though in historical terms it comes a good bit later. We will come back to this subsequently.

However much their presentations may otherwise be mutually complementary, this fundamental difference between Kierkegaard and Heidegger emerges clearly in their account of the presuppositions for life in the crowd. In Heidegger, the presupposition lies in the condition of human existence as care, as 'cura', which makes the fall into the 'one' unavoidable. In Kierkegaard, the presupposition for life in the crowd is what for him is the most fundamental peculiarity of human existence, which is precisely that the human cannot [22] avoid relating themselves in an absolute way to ends of one kind or another. If a human being knows only relative ends, then they relate themselves absolutely to those, which is to say that they live their whole life in something temporal and earthly, whereby they lose their self in the manifold of the temporal and earthly. For Kierkegaard, the loss in the crowd is therefore ultimately grounded in the religiosity of human existence. This therefore brings us to the question of how Kierkegaard understood existence.

2

On Kierkegaard's Account of the Doubling of the Relations of Spirit

[23/21] According to Kierkegaard there are two syntheses that belong to human existence. The first is the synthesis between soul and body. By 'body' what is meant is not only the individual's own human body, but the whole corporeal environment of which I am conscious. By 'body' is understood the whole environment made perceptible through the use of the senses of my body, of which I am made conscious through my sensory cognitive capacity. With respect to this point, what must be stressed is the re-flexivity expressed in the reflexive pronoun—I am *myself* conscious. For it is this reflexivity that really matters here. It precisely means that the soul or the consciousness in relation to corporeality relates itself to this, its own relation to corporeality. In the relation, consciousness relates itself to the relation.

This becomes clear if we contrast this relation between consciousness and that of which it is conscious to a simple relation. In the latter, both relata between which the relation holds relate to one another, without one or the other relatum relating itself to the relation. The one who relates themselves to the relation is the third party, who registers the relation. To take an example: in a causal relation, the two relata between which the relation holds are related to one another in the relationship of cause and [24] effect. But neither of the relata relate themselves in this relation to the relation. The relatum that is the cause does not relate itself to the relation, that is, to its own causality; for that it would have to be conscious. The same goes for the relatum that is the effect. The causal relation does not consciously register either the relatum that is the cause or the one that is the effect, but I register it as a third party. By contrast, in each conscious relation the one relatum, namely consciousness, relates itself in the relation to the relation.

However, the decisive factor according to Kierkegaard is now that this soul-body synthesis in human existence does not uphold itself by itself. [22] It cannot here be upheld by itself; a being, of which this was the case, would be no human being. In a human existence, the soul synthesis is always upheld by a new synthesis. Only in this way is a human being a self or spirit. In the soul-body

synthesis the relation is the negative third and must therefore be upheld through a new relation.

Between which relata does this new synthesis obtain? To this the answer is: between finitude and infinity, between temporality and eternity. What Kierkegaard means by this will be discussed later; let us just mention here his view that it belongs to human existence as finite to be placed under an infinite demand. Only in this way is a human being a spirit, a self.

While the relata of the first synthesis were soul and body, the relata of the new synthesis are of a completely different kind, namely finitude and infinity, temporality and eternity. But not only that. The difference between the two syntheses consists not only in the fact that the relata are both different—the purely formal structure, as it were, is different too. It is not that a human being as a finite being only relates to infinity, that in this relation they relate to this relation, exactly as the soul [25] relates itself to the bodily. The former would be the case, if the relation of human beings to infinity were only a conscious one, or in other words, if the relation of it to infinity were merely one of cognition. But it relates itself to infinity through a demand that directs itself as such to the *existence* of human beings. The demand belongs properly to existence; that is, it establishes as such an ethical relation. The merely cognitive relation to infinity is therefore improper, that is unethical, because infinity is present in the human synthesis only as demand. The formal structure of the synthesis between finitude and infinity is thus of a different kind from that of the synthesis between soul and body. It is not merely conscious, not merely cognising in a reflexive way.

At the beginning of *The Sickness unto Death*, which contains perhaps the most difficult but yet at the same time the most important passage in the whole of Kierkegaard's oeuvre, he expresses himself in this way: that in that relation between finitude and infinity that belongs to human [23] existence, the relation relates itself to itself, and precisely in this a human being is themselves or a self.¹

¹ The relevant passage reads as follows:

The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself, or more precisely, is that in the relation, that is the relation relating itself to itself; the self is not the relation, but that which relates the relation to itself. The human being is a synthesis of infinity and finitude, of temporality and eternity, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two things. Seen in this way a human being is still not a self.

In the relation between the two, the relation is the third as negative unity, and the two relate themselves to the relation, and in relation to the relation; thus under the determination of the soul, the relation between the soul and the body is a relation. If on the contrary the relation relates itself to itself, then this relation is the positive third, and that is the self. [SKS 11: 129/KW 19: 13]

Here he contrasts the synthesis between finitude and infinity with the soul-body synthesis, and so contrasts being a self with being conscious of something. These are very different things: being conscious of something [26] means in one's relation to consciousness, relating oneself to the relation, whereas being a self consists in the relation relating itself to itself. The relation in the latter case is the positive third—it upholds itself.

Kierkegaard thereby wants to point out various connections. Firstly he intends to establish that being human consists not only in being conscious of something, where this only involves cognition and knowledge, but rather that being human means being a self, whose existence is of fundamental concern to it; that is what it is to be an ethical individual.

So being a self involves a doubling: the relation relates itself to itself. Kierkegaard talks of this in other places; he calls it the doubling which is peculiar to each spiritual relation.

This doubling is called forth by the demand. The demand compels me to relate myself to myself. The demand places me in the decision-making situation, in which I relate myself to myself, insofar as I relate myself to my own possibility of being obedient or disobedient. Precisely in view of this doubling, Kierkegaard calls decision the inner action.

To put things another way: in standing under the demand, my existence is of fundamental concern to me. Not in such a way that it is a matter of saving my existence at any price, [24] but rather in the sense that it just is demanded. But when it concerns my existence, I relate myself to myself, and because it concerns my existence as one who has been demanded, I relate myself in deciding, in acting internally, in answering to my own self.

This doubling of the ethical relation is therefore wholly different from the reflexivity of consciousness. The bending, this relating back to oneself simultaneously in relating behaviour in the reflexivity of consciousness, is not directed to the self, but back to the relation. What matters in cognizing things is therefore that one forgets oneself. And if this is achieved, this in no way means that in cognizing one no longer relates oneself to the relation. [27] On the contrary, a human being forgets themselves, loses their self, when they proceed wholly in the re-flexivity of cognition: when in relating, they relate themselves to this relation.

The doubling of the spiritual relation must therefore at all costs be distinguished from self-perception. To be induced by the demand to relate oneself to oneself in decision and responsibility, does not mean to turn oneself into an object of inner perception. The latter is only a matter of a cognition; it therefore only belongs to consciousness. With inner perception, instead of becoming conscious of something outside themselves and cognizing it, a human being

will be conscious of something in themselves and cognize it, namely sentiments and resentments, inclinations and disinclinations, affects, and so on. As the self of self-perception, I am not the self as existent: self-perception is indeed not a matter of my existence in the inner act of decision. Rather, the 'self' of self-perception consists in psychological phenomena; and that they are mine—because this is merely a matter of perception and knowledge—is an accidental fact from an ethical point of view. But I myself, induced by the demand to relate myself to myself, am anything but accidental; for I am myself the one who has to act. I am myself this self as existent in the singularity of the decision. Put simply, in self-perception I relate myself to myself as something *given*—given in existing conditions, experience, and so on. In the doubling called forth by the demand, I relate myself to myself in my *possibility*. [25]

But the doubling of the ethical relationship is not yet adequately characterized by this opposition to the reflexivity of consciousness. From all that has been said so far, the doubling of the ethical relationship could [28] be characterized simply as follows: that the individual in their finitude relates themselves to themselves in their—possible—finitude, prompted by the infinite demand. The difference would consequently merely be this: while in self-perception I relate myself to myself as a finite being in my *given* finitude, under the infinite demand I relate myself to myself as a finite being. But Kierkegaard does not express himself in this way. Rather, he says that the *relation* relates itself to itself. To be a self, to be a spirit, consists in the fact that the relation between finitude and infinity relates itself to itself.

What he means is that the infinite demand is not directed to human beings from outside, so that no doubling is called forth within the realm of the finitude of human beings. Rather, the infinite demand directs itself from inside the individual; the infinite demand belongs with human existence; it itself takes part in the doubling that it brings forth.

With this we have arrived at another statement that Kierkegaard has also made with his thesis of the relationship that relates itself to itself. If the infinite demand came from outside the person, so that infinity did not belong to being human, then a human being in their finitude would be a metaphysically unambiguous being. And in addition, that would mean that a human being could take on the relationship to God as a self-standing partner. Despite there being the greatest possible difference between God and human beings, namely a difference between infinity and finitude, between eternity and temporality, nonetheless human beings would find themselves in a certain sense on the same footing as God, as one metaphysically unambiguous being set against another metaphysically unambiguous being. The contradictoriness of such a metaphysical conception

is [29] clearly shown by Bultmann in his essay 'What Does It Mean to Talk about God?' from his [26] book *Faith and Understanding*.¹ To talk of God, a human being can talk only as a person who is addressed by God, concerning whose existence God has the whole claim. In making a metaphysically comparative statement of the difference in essence between God and human beings, a human being acts as if they exist outside this claim, which is why their talk is absurd. But that means that only by understanding that infinitude belongs to being human, can human beings talk about God in a meaningful way. For it is a nonsensical metaphysical position to hold that the infinite demand comes from outside human beings, in a way that would imply that what it means to be a human being can be determined in a metaphysically unambiguous way without the relation to infinity.

On the other hand, this does not imply that infinity—or eternity—is an integrated part of the human essence. For then infinity could not be lost from it, which it clearly can be. Kierkegaard wants to retain both: that infinity belongs along with human existence, but that it is not in the essence of human beings, in the sense that it cannot be lost.

Is that not an obvious contradiction? No, for we must distinguish between the existence and the essence of human beings. What can be lost cannot be part of the essence, the essential nature of human beings. But what can be lost can certainly belong to existence, even as lost. One should therefore not infer from existence to essence. One therefore ought not to infer that because a human being as an existing being is not without relation to infinity and eternity, so then infinity and eternity make up an element of the human essence and so cannot be lost. For infinity is precisely what belongs to human existence, without being an element in their essence.

But what does it mean, that infinity even if lost still belongs with existence? It means that the individual, insofar as they have lost their relation to infinity, can only exist [30] in loss. They cannot get out of the state of loss. They cannot put the relation to infinity behind them and become someone else, to whose existence this relation [27] no longer belongs since it is lost. That is ruled out. They can only live 'outside' of infinity in its loss. The relation to infinity is present in each moment of loss. It becomes—to use a term from the philosophy of Heidegger—an existence in a deficient mode of relationship. Kierkegaard says in *The Sickness unto Death*: 'They cannot shake off the eternal, no, not in all eternity; they cannot throw it away for all time, nothing is more impossible; they must in each moment, where they don't have it, either have cast it off or be casting it off' (SKS 11: 132/KW 19: 17).

And that is the crucial thing that Kierkegaard wants to articulate with his remarks on the relationship that relates itself to itself. He wants here to express

two things in one: (1) infinity, eternity is lost. As he formulates it: the relation has made itself independent; the relation relates itself to itself. (2) Even if lost, infinity, eternity still belongs to human existence. He makes this intelligible by saying that the relation remains in its independence the same relation. In the loss of infinity the human being remains a relation between finitude and infinity.

In becoming independent from the relationship, the human being has detached themselves from infinity, but they exist in the state of detachment—as the same relationship—still in relation to infinity.

To summarize the discussion up to now: Kierkegaard wants to say both that to become a self is an ethical task, and also that a human being is a self only in the loss of infinity. [31]

He says the former, in distinguishing being a self from being conscious. Not effortlessly, not by virtue of their essence as consciousness, is the individual one and the same, a self, but only by virtue of their relation to infinity. The continuous movement, the continuous oscillation, or, as Kierkegaard says, the alternating of existence, threatens to dissolve the human being's identity. Therefore to be one and the same is a continuous task; only through the relationship to infinity can the individual gain their identity in and through the alternating of existence. If they do not concern themselves with their relation to infinity, their identity is lost, and they will turn into, as it says in the *Postscript*, [28] an 'inhuman millipede' (SKS 7: 162/12.1: 176). Identity must therefore be earned throughout the whole of life.

Insofar as infinity as a demand directs itself at existence and places the individual in the moment of decision, it means that the individual can gain their identity, their self, only in transforming their existence in relation to infinity.

The distinctive thing is therefore that the question of the identity of the subject for Kierkegaard is not a psychological or phenomenological question, but an ethico-religious one. In this view there lies a polemic against Hegelian speculation. But transposed to our situation, it is also a different view from positivism in the modern sense. To mention an example, Bertrand Russell raises the objection to the famous sentence of Descartes's 'cogito ergo sum', that thought doesn't necessarily imply a thinker, an 'I', that has the thought. According to Russell, Descartes should have begun not with the sentence 'I think', but rather with 'there is thinking'. 'Why should not a thinker be simply a certain series of thoughts, connected with each other by causal laws?' (*An Outline of Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1927), p. 171). From Kierkegaard's perspective the question whether the individual is or is not an 'I' or a 'self' cannot [32] be answered through raising the problems posed by Bertrand Russell in his critique of Descartes. What it means to be an identical subject, an 'I' in the sense of a

'self', will not be decided in a quarrel over the unity of consciousness, but in the—ethical—decision. The individual becomes one and the same (an 'I', a 'self') through the relation of itself to itself, through the doubling of the spirit relationship that the infinite demand brings forth.

Moreover, this individual will only be themselves by their tearing themselves away from infinity. The self only emerges if and when it becomes independent of this relationship to eternity. The human being only becomes spirit through guilt.

Does this mean that the human being in the state of innocence is not a self, is not spirit? In the state of innocence, is the soul-body synthesis only sustained by the reflexivity of consciousness? That would obviously be nonsense, because then human beings in the state of innocence would not yet be human beings. In the state of innocence, in which spirit is, the soul-body synthesis is upheld by the self. But how [29] is that possible, if the individual becomes a spirit or a self only in guilt, only in making itself independent of, and tearing itself away from, the relationship to infinity? This is explained by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Anxiety*.

To put it only briefly: in innocence, the individual relates themselves to themselves, but without knowing what this relationship to themselves consists in. In innocence, the soul-body synthesis is upheld by the synthesis of self or spirit, without it being the case that the human being knows what this latter synthesis consists in; that is to say, they do not know of that infinity to which they relate themselves as self and as spirit. And yet infinity, eternity, is there in the ignorance belonging to innocence, insofar as the soul-body synthesis is sustained by the synthesis of the self and spirit. For infinity is there as nothingness, and the self and spirit is there as anxiety in the face of nothingness. Only in a relationship to [33] infinity, from which the individual tears themselves off and makes themselves independent in guilt, will they be a self. But this infinity projects itself in the ignorance belonging to innocence as nothingness, before which the innocence experiences anxiety. The characteristic of anxiety is indeed that the human being experiences anxiety before everything undetermined, before the nothingness, in contrast to fear, in which the human being is always faced by something determinate, which they know. The spirit is—as Kierkegaard puts it—'dreamingly present in innocence as anxiety in the face of nothingness'.ⁱⁱ

The loss of infinity, which results from becoming independent of the relationship to infinity, manifests itself in the character of existence as movement. Existing is always a continuous becoming. In Kierkegaard this is never a simple phenomenological determination of human existence just as it is. Rather existence is movement, because the human being does not possess everything, or, in other words, because the human being is outside eternity, insofar as it belongs to

eternity to possess everything. But to be outside eternity does not mean to be outside every relation to eternity, for then eternity would have nothing to do with the movement of existence. The character of existence as becoming rests on the fact that the human is outside the life of eternity, but in this 'outside' they relate themselves to eternity. Eternity, infinity, is consequently there in human existence in negativity. This existence of eternity or infinity in negativity is the presupposition of human existence, insofar as existence [30] consists precisely in movement, in becoming, which this negativity sets in motion, so to speak. That is to say, the fundamental category of existence—that it is becoming—is for Kierkegaard a religious category, determined in opposition to the life of eternity, in which the human being essentially possesses everything, and where there is therefore no becoming and no existence. In his *Concluding Unscientific [34] Postscript* he therefore expresses himself as follows: 'The conception of the distinction here (i.e. temporality) and hereafter (i.e. eternity) is at bottom the conception of *the existing*' (SKS 7: 518/KW 12.1: 570)ⁱⁱⁱ—or, 'But what is existence? It is that child born of infinity and finitude, the eternal and the temporal and which therefore is continuously striving' (SKS 7: 91/KW 12.1: 92).

Another determination of the same thought is expressed through the 'striving', which indicates that the movement has a direction, namely towards infinity. We should not read too much into this expression; it is not a matter of a striving in which one gets nearer to one's goal step by step, and which might possibly be attained one fine day. Rather, it is a striving that never gets anywhere. For that reason Kierkegaard also calls it an infinite striving, infinite insofar as the distance from infinity can never be lessened even to the smallest degree.

One therefore cannot exist in this genuine sense without passion. For existing means putting together things which are so incompatible in a way such that they can never come to rest in a mutual harmony. But holding together that which can only be held together in constant unrest and struggle requires passion. Finitude and infinity, temporality and eternity, cannot be held together in a way that leads to a balance; they are incompatible. Therefore existence is a monstrous contradiction and a permanent effort.

There is the constant temptation to give up the effort of holding together the incompatible, either by forgetting the relation to eternity, or by forgetting existence. [31] Either the existing individual—induced by the fact that in their relationship with infinity and eternity they are on the outside—dispassionately forgets infinity and eternity in order to live merely within finitude and temporality. That is to say, that finite and relative ends become everything to them, and they thereby do not avoid losing their self to the crowd. [35] They let their life be determined by the others in a spiritless way. Or the fact that they relate

themselves towards infinity and eternity induces the existing individual to forget dispassionately that in this relationship they exist outside eternity. This takes place in speculation, in pure thought *sub specie eterni* [under the aspect of eternity].

By contrast, it is only with the help of passion that one can, with clarity and at the same moment, firmly grasp both the relation to infinity and eternity and the fact that one exists in finitude and temporality outside eternity; for finitude and infinity, temporality and eternity, are incompatible magnitudes.

In order to avoid a misunderstanding, it should be said that for Kierkegaard these determinations are not to do with Christianity. His understanding of existence is certainly religious, but in a human, immanent way. It is a matter of 'creating an immanent path to infinity' (SKS 7: 167/SKS 12.1: 182). Put briefly, Kierkegaard is doing philosophy and not theology. In what follows, too, we shall only have to do with Kierkegaard as a philosopher. Kierkegaard's view of Christianity, and the problems it gives rise to, will not be taken into consideration here.

3

The Relation between Heidegger's and Kierkegaard's Analyses of Existence

[36/32] Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger's philosophy also starts from the assumption that being a self is something different from having consciousness. Heidegger also analyses human existence as something in which the human is concerned with their own existence; and because the human being therein relates themselves to themselves, one can say that the theme of the Heideggerian analysis is precisely being a self. Moreover, Heidegger's thinking focuses on the topic of an individual in its relation to itself in its possibilities, because for him as for Kierkegaard existence is a becoming. And finally, also for Heidegger a negativity underlies becoming.

As similar as their accounts are in one respect, however, they are just as dissimilar in another. For whilst in Kierkegaard all the peculiarities of human existence mentioned above are given with the infinite demand that comes from inside, in Heidegger they are given with the pre-ethical constitution of human existence as care, as 'cura'.

How is this to be understood in more detail? The human being is abandoned to themselves. Therefore in their existence, they are fundamentally concerned with their own existence. The human being has to take over their existence and care for themselves and others. Our relation to the world (in which we are abandoned to ourselves, and in which we—in engaging with worldly things [37]—are directed towards the world) consists therefore in caring for all kinds of things, in order to be able to care for ourselves and others.

Behind this permanent movement of care, the human being—abandoned to themselves, as they simply are—cannot reach any unmoving substance, about which the human being would not need to care. Strictly speaking, one therefore cannot say that existence moves, as if it were something other than its movement,

thus something in itself unmoving. Rather existence *is* movement; that is to say, the human being is always already in the process of caring for themselves or the other. [33]

That the existing being as such is not and cannot be something unmoving, but rather is always in the movement of care, means that the existing being is always already in the process of existing in one of its possibilities. Put briefly, that existence is movement means that existence is possibility. Heidegger calls this peculiarity, that the existing being is only there in grasping one or other of its possibilities, 'being ahead of itself'. This interpretation of existence corresponds to Kierkegaard's view of existence as becoming, as well as his assertion in *The Concept of Anxiety* 'that the concept of movement is itself a transcendence' (SKS 4: 320/KW 8: 13).

These peculiarities are very closely linked. The human being is always ahead of themselves in existing in one or other possibility because in human existence, insofar as the human being is abandoned to themselves, existence is fundamentally concerned with its own existence.

Being abandoned to oneself as well as taking over oneself are therefore not events that happen once and for all, and which the individual can leave behind; rather, only in them does one exist at all.

Now, something negative underlies one's taking over one's own existence, namely this: not to [38] have given oneself existence and in this sense not to be master of it. The negativity that adheres to the fact that one must take over one's existence manifests itself in the fundamental mood of care, as well as making existence the continuous movement of care, into the being-ahead-of-itself in existence of one or other possibility.

It follows from the preceding account that the existing being is not as it were a self from the outset (as some substance or other), but only in the relation to themselves that exists in virtue of the fact that they, as existing, have to care (in the widest sense) for themselves. [34]

To the extent that the human being, abandoned to themselves, is directed towards the world, they are fully immersed in occupation with things. In this the human engages themselves with these things, caring for one thing and the other initially and mostly in the way that 'one' cares for them. As we said previously, they are always already in the process of caring for themselves or others. The individual does not first decide to do it, but is always already thrown into it—ahead of themselves, simply as they are, as Heidegger puts it. Hence, according to him, 'one' has always already decided for the individual in which way they have to care for themselves and for others. The structure of their

existence makes it inevitable that the human being always initially and for the most part is at the mercy of what 'one' has decided, even though 'no one' has decided. Thus, to the extent that in care the individual is concerned with their own existence, they can only become the self that they become when they put themselves at the mercy of the crowd. They understand the world, their own existence, their life with the other, in the way that 'one' understands all of this. That means that the possibilities of their existence are limited to what is already known, attainable and successful. They live within those things that are customary and proper. They become, as Heidegger says, blind to possibilities. That in no way hinders, but rather promotes, busyness. It is just that there are no new possibilities [39] that can be actualized in this way; there is only what is available, which can be tactically altered in such a way that it seems that something is happening.

To have lost themselves to the crowd therefore does not mean that the person under consideration is no longer fundamentally concerned about their own existence. That is indeed the case, but it concerns their own existence in an inauthentic sense;¹ this all turns on what 'one oneself' is and wants.

The question for Heidegger now is how the human becomes themselves in an authentic sense. His answer is: it happens through conscience. Here lies *the* possibility in a strict sense of being a self as an individual, the possibility that is given with my existence and that makes itself known and calls me back from absent-mindedness and the fall into 'one' and 'no one'.

Now what does it mean to be a self as an individual in a strict sense? [35] It means to face the fact that in my existence I am abandoned to myself! Hence conscience is grounded in the constitution of my existence as care, insofar as it is care, because I am abandoned to myself.

The structure of my existence as care, then, initially and usually gives me also occasion to lose myself to the 'one'; but the structure of my existence as conscience can also give occasion to be a self in a strict sense as an individual. In the latter case, in the case of conscience, I am as much the caller as the one who is called. As caller, I am abandoned completely to myself, and as called I have lost myself to the 'one'. Without needing to go further into Heidegger's thoughts on conscience, it is wholly clear that his interpretation of conscience corresponds to what Kierkegaard called the doubling that is typical of each spiritual relation.

Facing up to being abandoned to oneself happens for the individual in anxiety. In conscience [40] I am therefore called upon before myself, to take over my self in my abandonment in the fundamental mood of anxiety.

Heidegger takes up Kierkegaard's distinction between fear and anxiety. What a human being fears is always something determinate, of which they have

knowledge. That of which human beings are anxious is always something indeterminate; it is nowhere and yet so near that it constricts my existence. That is why people say 'it was nothing' when the anxiety has subsided. Because in and through anxiety, my world, in which I am concerned with all sorts of things and where everything with which I am engaged gives my life significance and value, collapses into insignificance. In anxiety over nothingness, none of the things which otherwise interest me, no aspect of life with others, means anything any longer. Prevented as I am from understanding my self in the crowd by its understanding and evaluations, I am thrown back onto that of which I was anxious, namely existing as the individual that in my abandoned state I am.

Existence in the crowd (in the 'one', as Heidegger puts it), where [36] my self is absorbed in occupation with things, is a flight from the possibility of being oneself—in and through anxiety. In existence where the individual loses themselves to the 'one' and takes over all its benchmarks and rules, they are at home. But this peaceful being-at-home, this dispersal in the familiar engagement with all things, is a flight from the anxiety in which this feeling-onself-at-home and this familiarity disappears, because their world and itsⁱⁱ things sink down into insignificance. This is why people say that the human in a state of anxiety has an uncanny or unhomely feeling. But this un-homeliness is what is the original state. It is always behind life in the crowd and threatens it; anxiety can surface in a totally harmless situation.

Anxiety is anxiety in the face of the total loss of objects, in the face of nothingness, and similarly concerning one's own existence. [41] In this anxiety, the negativity that lies at the basis of human existence manifests itself: the human being has not given themselves their own existence and—in this sense—has no control over it. In this powerlessness, the individual cannot sustain their existence in the face of nothingness.

This negativity, which rules the whole of existence, insofar as the individual is abandoned to themselves in it, is laid bare in the determination of their existence as an existence towards death.

The human being does not come to death only at their life's end; rather, death belongs to life from the very beginning. Life in each of its moments and in all of its expressions is determined by death.

Only the individual can take over their own death. What is at stake, after all, is the most individual of possibilities, namely the imminent possibility of being no more. In death, all relations to others and their existence are broken off. It is the outermost [37] possibility of existence for the individual; no one can put their own death behind them.

As a life toward death, life is therefore determined by a possibility. However, the possible, to which the individual relates themselves, has no possibility of

being realized. Rather, the possible is here an impossibility: the termination of one's own existence.

The certainty of death consists in the fact that I can die at any moment; in virtue of this indeterminacy, death reaches in a penetrating way into each moment of life.

That existence is at the mercy of death is no mere item of knowledge; rather the fundamental way it announces itself is in anxiety.

Lost to the 'one', one keeps death at bay with the aid of the dominant interpretation of existence. Death becomes a mere 'casualty', a well-known and frequent event. It will also occur at some stage for the person concerned, but not for the time being. It is said that 'one dies', but that means that for the time being it only has to do with others, not me. The death that is [42] my own death becomes an event which is part of public life that happens to the 'one' that is 'no one'. One acts as though it were 'one' who dies and not 'I'. One covers up and evades the fact that death is my own possibility in an eminent sense. {The vulgar understanding is based on an ontological misconception.} The idle talk about death in 'the one' is typically ambiguous.

The cover-up is also manifested in the fact that the nearest and dearest of the dying person try to talk them into the belief that they shall not die and to console them with this; that is, their 'consolation' consists in helping them in this way to cover up what is eminently their own possibility of being pried away from all relationship to others. And this happens by talking them into believing that they will return to their calm life in the 'one'. A calming down that is just as much for the 'consoler' as the dying. [38]

One also ensures that this attitude towards death gains respect from the 'one' by belittling the anxiety of looking at one's death—as one's very own possibility—in the eye. This comes about through one transforming the courage that is involved in having anxiety into a fear in the face of an imminent event. And so it is said: to think about death is cowardice, weakness, insecurity, and escapism! It is further said that one must treat the 'fact' that one dies with a lofty indifference. In this way, 'one' keeps death at bay, in that 'one' estranges themselves from their most individual possibility.

Being oneself authentically, retrieving oneself from being lost to the crowd, comes about by the way in which the individual looks the fact in the eye that their life is determined from the perspective of death. After all, death is in the eminent sense their own possibility; to allow it to come up close, therefore, excludes an understanding of one's existence in terms set by others.

That does not mean that existence gains another structure or another shape; rather it means that all factual possibilities of existence are seen as finite from the

perspective of my death, [43] as my own outermost possibility of existence. I cannot tie myself down to the possibilities that are already actualized or are to be actualized; I cannot take cover behind these and understand myself in their terms. For the task still remains: to be myself wholly alone in my last, outermost possibility, in death.

This life towards death is a freedom towards death, because in it I am myself as an individual, freed of all the illusions that characterize life that falls into the 'one'.

It follows from all this that life towards death is grounded in the structure of existence as care. Existence is care, because the human being is abandoned to himself. But that precisely is the individual in the face of death. Death cuts all connections to the other and places the individual on their own. To be abandoned to death and existence from the perspective of death is therefore a fundamental [39] way to be abandoned on one's own in care. In care, what is at stake in the human being's existence is their own existence, because one is abandoned to oneself. But in anxiety in the face of death, the individual experiences anxiety in particular about their own existence. There can be no more fundamental manner for the individual to be concerned with their own existence than when they experience anxiety over death.

Moving on now to the relation between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, it is clear from what has been said that they have the same concerns. For both of them, the question is how the individual lives authentically without losing oneself to the crowd.

Kierkegaard's determination of existence as movement, as becoming, corresponds to its determination by Heidegger as an always new realization of possibilities. For both, [44] to fall into the crowd consists among other things in a masking of the character of existence in its becoming, its possibility. The question can therefore also be formulated as follows: how can the individual remain true to their existence in their becoming, in its possibility? But while the question is the same for both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, their answers are different.

Let us start by investigating Heidegger's answer! It is obvious that it is only as long as a possibility is a possibility that it can maintain the individual in existence; as soon as it is realized a new possibility is required. In the opposite case, the individual commits to what is already realized and thereby masks the character of their existence as possibility. And that means that the individual gives themselves up and leaves their life to the interpretation of others. For what is realized is, as realized, surrendered to the crowd and its understanding; it is after all something objective. If I am satisfied with what I have achieved, then I judge myself as 'one' judges me.

The difficulty, however, is greater than first thought. For it does not resolve the problem that, as soon as a possibility is realized, a new one is envisaged. For each real possibility is possible in view of its realization, which is why the individual inevitably disregards the possible and focuses [40] on the realization—already even while it is a possibility. Each real possibility is viewed in the light of its realization, thereby inviting the individual to seek cover in anticipation by taking cover behind what has been realized and so surrender themselves to the judgment of the crowd. No finite possibility can keep the individual in authentic existence. Taking cover behind what is realized means not just to rest on one's laurels, but included in this is also a busy interest in everything that one wants to undertake in the future. It means to indulge in the illusion that a human being is that which they have already accomplished in the past, [45] and what they will accomplish in the future.

What is required is therefore a possibility that can never be realized, but is and remains possibility, not only in the sense that the realized lies beyond human capacities, but also in that the possible has no relation to any realization. What is required is a *pure* possibility, which does not lure human beings into the fantasy of seeking cover behind what is realized, but rather which prevents the individual from doing this, as soon as this pure possibility is in view. It must therefore be a possibility that annihilates not only everything the individual has realized up to now, but also what they will realize in the future. This means in Heidegger's own terminology: a pure possibility, which turns all finite possibilities into real possibilities whose meaning it is that they be realized. This pure possibility is death; for this does not relate itself to its realization but to an impossibility: to the cessation of existence. Death is therefore the possibility with the help of which the individual can maintain themselves in existence.

By contrast, for Kierkegaard the individual can only hold themselves in authentic existence through the relation to infinity and eternity; for the individual can never leave behind the unconditioned demand in a realization of it. Each conditioned demand, which as such requires a determinate action, can be realized, and the person can leave it behind. However, the individual can never be finished with the unconditioned demand, which as such requires not this or that, but rather the individual *themselves*—that is to say, [41] their *self*. This demand is precisely infinite; it is new in every instant; it always stands before the individual and forces them to relate themselves to themselves in their possibility.

In connection with this, for Kierkegaard it is therefore of decisive importance that for authentic action [46] it is inessential what is actualized in an external sense. The effects and results of ethical action are accidental from an ethical perspective, and the agent does not have to concern themselves with them. The

ethical consists in 'willing with your utmost capacity', but without thinking of one's willing 'whether anything will thereby be realized or not'.

Kierkegaard distinguishes between acting 'towards achievement' and acting 'towards inwardness' [*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, SKS 7: 277/KW 12.1: 304].

In order to understand this we must make clear that being able to act presupposes the ability to relate oneself to something in the future. That means that only a being whose existence is becoming can act, because only such a being can relate itself to the future.

Now the individual can either merely live, without paying attention to the real and crucial reason why existence is becoming, or they can be aware that by virtue of its relation to infinity, existence is becoming.

But that determines the character of action. In the first case, in which they do not pay attention to the decisive ground for the becoming of their existence, they will look at this becoming already as given with the temporality of their existence. From this it follows that what lies in the future, to which they relate in their becoming and in their actions, can only be something temporal, finite, and relative. In other words, they will only know actions as achievements, as the realization of real [faktische], finite, possibilities. Action is for them only an externally directed activity that either reorganizes the world, 'as when the emperor conquers the whole world and makes the people into slaves', or the individual's external existence, 'as when the lieutenant becomes an emperor, and the usurer becomes a millionaire, or whatever else can happen' [SKS 7: 393/KW 12.1: 432–3].

But in the second case, by contrast, the existing individual knows that [42] their existence is becoming by virtue of its relation to infinity. In that case what lies in the future, to which they relate themselves in their [47] becoming and in their actions, becomes the infinite and eternal. Here, to act means to relate oneself, in infinite passion, to the eternal as what lies in the future.

Thus understood, the action *sensu eminenti* [in an eminent sense] is really the decision itself. It can therefore already be carried out, indeed is almost always already carried out, before the external action takes place. In other words, the decision is usually made before the individual brings about in the external world what follows from the decision. Kierkegaard mentions as an example Luther at the Diet of Worms. 'The external appearance of Luther's action is that he stood before the Diet at Worms; but from the instant in which he existed with a passionate decision of his whole subjectivity in the willing...he had already acted' [SKS 7: 311/KW 12.1: 341]. An (unwitting) illustration of this is the account of the same event in the novel about Luther, *Fear and Courage*, by the

Danish writer Jakob Knudsen. He describes how Luther's decision took place after the overcoming of temptation in the night before his appearance at the Diet, so that all the subsequent events took place with an almost somnambulant certainty.

Hence the action *sensu eminenti* has occurred as soon as the decision is made, even if a *force majeure* should get in the way of the external action. A failure of the external action to materialize does not retroactively cancel the internal action.

All this makes it clear that Kierkegaard in one way or another wishes to claim that the human being becomes unfaithful to the becoming, the movement of their existence, if they commit themselves to what has already been realized or to what they intend to realize in the future. What really constitutes action is not realization; for the future to which it relates as eternal and infinite is by definition beyond realization. That, precisely, is why it is inner action, and that means decision. We will [48] return to this in the conclusion in a somewhat different connection.ⁱⁱⁱ

Moving on to the interpretation of the phenomenon of anxiety in [43] Kierkegaard and Heidegger, we see the same: behind their agreement—for both, anxiety is anxiety concerning nothingness as opposed to fear, where fear as such concerns something determinate—there lies a decisive difference. For Heidegger, the nothingness in the face of which the individual has anxiety is the insignificance of everything finite; that is to say, their anxiety is anxiety concerning the nothingness of their own existence. The negativity that lies at the basis of human existence is and remains negativity.

According to Kierkegaard, by contrast, behind the nothingness of anxiety lies infinity. The eternity, the infinity, to which the individual as a self and spirit relates, announces itself already in the ignorance of immediacy and innocence as the nothingness in the face of which the unreflective^{iv} and innocent person experiences anxiety. The individual only attains clarity about their relation to infinity and eternity by tearing themselves away from infinity and eternity; a self will only become a self in selfishness; the individual only becomes spirit in the infinity of their guilt. And that announces itself in immediacy and innocence, where the individual does not yet know of infinity and eternity, as anxiety—in the face of nothingness. Infinity and eternity are present, in the ignorance of innocence, as the nothingness of anxiety. But that means that the nothingness of anxiety has a particularly positive and ethical precondition, namely infinity, which as such is a demand. Kierkegaard's whole thought is ethically determined. Even the nothingness of anxiety is ethically determined—namely, from the perspective of infinity.

Thus both thinkers constantly apply the same or corresponding formal determinations, but with a wholly different content. For both, the human being in

their existence is fundamentally concerned with their own existence, and therein they all the time relate themselves to their possibilities. But according to Heidegger this means that the human being, because he is abandoned [49] to himself, is concerned in care and death with his own existence; while according to Kierkegaard, the human being is fundamentally concerned with their existence, because *this existence* is demanded and a human being cannot be satisfied with just cognizing.

The individual relates themselves to themselves; the spirit relation consists in a doubling. According to Heidegger, this is because the abandoned and [44] isolated self through conscience calls itself back from being lost in the crowd, in order to live as an individual in a life directed towards their own death; while according to Kierkegaard, it is because the infinite demand places the individual in the decision situation, where they relate themselves to themselves.

There lies a negativity at the basis of the movement, the becoming, that existence consists in. According to Heidegger, this negativity is related to the lack of control that the individual has over their own existence, to the fact that the human being, in care and death, is abandoned to his own devices. According to Kierkegaard, this negativity arises from the fact that the human being in their relation to infinity and eternity, which constitute them as self and spirit, exists outside infinity and eternity, which are therefore only there in negativity.

4

On Kierkegaard's Account of the Problem of Taking over Concrete Existence

[50/45] The opposition that shapes Kierkegaard's thought just as much as Heidegger's—as it has emerged from our investigations thus far—can be expressed in two different ways: first, the opposition between living as an individual and giving oneself up to the crowd; second, the opposition between being faithful to the character of existence as becoming and possibility on the one hand, and committing oneself to what has been realized on the other. These two oppositions could not be more closely connected: for the will of a human being to be true to the character of their existence as becoming and possibility brings with it that they live their life as an individual, just as being committed to what has been realized means that they are lost in the crowd.

Each human being immediately lives their life in the crowd; the constant task is therefore to get themselves out of being lost in the crowd. Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's answer to this, how the task is to be achieved, is formally the same: it happens by relation to something absolute, it happens in relation to a radicality that is unsurpassable. The absolute and the radical brings it about that the human being has to fend for themselves, just as it keeps the human being in the sphere of becoming and the possibility of existence. For the [51] absolute and radical lie beyond any realization; hence as long as the human being relates themselves in this way to the former, they cannot commit themselves to what has been realized.

Now certainly Kierkegaard and Heidegger give completely different accounts of this absolute and radical. For Kierkegaard it is infinity and eternity, for Heidegger it is death. But for both the task that existence sets for the human being is to pull themselves again and again out of life in the crowd—where they have committed themselves to that which is realized or will be realized—and this has to be done through a strenuous concentrated consciousness of their relation to the absolute, to infinity or to death. [46]

The question now arises how, on closer inspection, the desire to be individual or true to the character of their existence as becoming and movement is expressed in the concrete existence of humanity. How can the relation to infinity, to eternity, or to death penetrate the concrete existence of a human being? How does the relation to this absolute and radical have any impact?

Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger pose this question. Heidegger has not wasted a lot of space on it, which is doubtless connected to the fact that his philosophy is not concerned with being a philosophy of existence, but is intended as an ontology, to which the philosophy of existence is only an introduction. By contrast it plays a decisive role in Kierkegaard's thought as a whole. He circles round the problem again and again and tries to deal with it this way and that; it can therefore rightly be called *the* problem of his life and thought. We now turn to his views on the matter.

How does Kierkegaard understand concrete, external existence? To this we can formulate the answer: he understands by this the individual with the capacities and [52] inclinations with which they are endowed, and that mark out a range of temporal and also relative and finite goals for their work, since indeed the capacities want to be developed and the inclinations satisfied. Further, the individual is one whose life is played out in a range of external circumstances, in a determinate order of things: a human being is a child, husband, father, or mother; a citizen of a country with a particular job and so on and so forth—all relations that give the individual a range of duties, and at the same time also constitute the framework for the development of their capacities and the satisfaction of their inclinations, the framework also inside which they set themselves their goals.

Now a human being can live in two very different ways in this, their concrete existence. One can, as Kierkegaard puts it, 'remain standing at the point that is immediately determined for the individual' [*The Concept* [47] of *Anxiety* SKS 4: 407/KW 8: 105]; that is, one can immediately, without further ado, follow the drive to develop one's capacities and to satisfy one's inclinations, and can fulfil duties in life within the order of things as child, husband, father or mother, as citizen, and so on—as much as is required by that order of things. The individual thus lets their goals be set in part by their own capacities and inclinations and in part by the order of things—immediately, that is, without a genuine decision or resolution.

So 'remaining standing at the point that is immediately determined for the individual' results—with one exception—in the fact that the human being lets their life be determined by the crowd {as I have explained in my first lecture}. For

in order to resist this, one must be a genius. But if one is not, then one develops capacities, satisfies inclinations, fulfils one's duties, just as others do, and with the same goal of realizing things that all the others have.

The reason why the situation is different for the genius is not because for them it is a matter of not living immediately. [53] Indeed they do live in immediacy, to just the same degree as other people let their goals be set by their capacities; only the capacity here is a talent in the highest degree, so the goal and the action are extraordinary and far outshine other people's. Thus it is not because of an ethical difference that the genius does not live the life in the crowd: the genius lives as immediately as the crowd, and viewed ethically the difference between the immediacy of the genius and of the crowd is a mere accident.

The opposite to 'remaining standing at the point that is immediately determined for the individual' now consists in penetrating one's concrete existence through one's relation to infinity and eternity. And what does this latter relation consist in? So far all that has been said about this {in my second lecture} is that infinity and eternity as such are the demand in the existence of the human being. Before we elaborate on what is going on here, it ought to be pointed out [48] that Kierkegaard at one point in *The Sickness unto Death* gives a psychological basis for his view that the human being through infinity and eternity becomes spirit or a self.

That the movement of infinitization—just as of finitization, to which we will return—constitutes the self is something Kierkegaard makes clear in pointing out that imagination is the fundamental capacity of human beings. The movement of infinitization has its origin in imagination. And just as infinitization is not only a more or less derived moment in the existence of the self, but rather the movement which—together with finitization—is the very thing which constitutes the existence of the self as becoming and possibility, so imagination is at the same time not only a capacity on a par with other capacities—of knowing, feeling, and willing—but nothing less than their basis. {Without imagination, knowledge is not knowledge, emotion is not emotion, and will is not will.} Imagination 'is no capacity like the other capacities; it is, if one wants to speak these terms, the capacity *instar omnium* [above all others]. How much feeling, knowledge or will someone has [54] rests ultimately on how much imagination they have, namely how feeling, knowledge and will reflects themselves: i.e. on imagination' (*The Sickness unto Death*, SK 11: 147/KW 19: 31). That Kierkegaard here, as incidentally he does elsewhere, starts out from the epistemology of transcendental idealist philosophy shall not be elaborated on further at this point; characteristic of this philosophy is indeed precisely the conception of imagination or, as it is said, the productive power of imagination as the innermost nerve of knowledge.

Kierkegaard mentions the relevant passage from Fichte on this issue: 'The imagination is the infinitizing reflection, which is why the elder Fichte correctly takes that even as related to knowledge, imagination is the origin of the categories' (ibid).ⁱ And Heidegger in his interpretation of Kant in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* has shown how this is already the case for Kant himself. We want rather to ask what Kierkegaard's intention was when in connection with these reflections he approached the psychological basis of the infinitizing movement of the imagination. [49] {The answer is that} he wants to show that the self in the infinitizing movement, if one leaves it at that, must lose itself. In this movement it meets no resistance; for the self lives here in a world that it creates in a sovereign manner through the element of imagination in knowledge, feeling, and will. The point of Kierkegaard's claim is that if only the movement of infinitization occurs, the self loses itself—and the word 'loses' here should be understood literally, namely, in an ethical sense; for the self is concrete {and finite} and perishes in infinitization and its abstraction. Human beings live in fantasyⁱⁱ when they confine themselves to imagination in knowledge, feeling, and will and the imagination's infinitization of the activity of knowledge, feeling, and will; they forget that they are a concrete, finite, and limited self.

Kierkegaard describes this more precisely; he says feeling is no longer the feeling of the individual human being, but rather a kind of [55] abstract way of feeling in the name of humanity. When it comes to knowledge, this happens because self-knowledge cannot keep pace with knowledge; on the contrary the self is squandered in knowledge, which then—that is, without self-knowledge—becomes inhuman. The world of knowledge is in fact limitless, because the nerve of knowledge is the infinitizing movement of the imagination. The self that is concrete, finite, and limited disappears in knowledge. And now concerning the will, its goal is so distant and infinite that it does not let itself be brought about in the present; there is no will left 'to bring about the infinitely small part of work that lets itself be accomplished this very day, this very hour, this very moment' (SKS 11: 148/KW 19: 32).

It is therefore essential that the opposite movement, the movement of finitization, comes about. The task therefore announces itself of taking over oneself in one's concrete existence.

The self has thus been determined as a relation between infinity and [50] finitude, which relates itself to itself. It can therefore be characterized by a double movement. In *The Sickness unto Death* this is put as follows: 'Accordingly, the development consists in moving away from oneself infinitely by the process of infinitizing oneself, and in returning to oneself infinitely by the process of finitizing' (SKS 11: 146/KW 11: 30). If the movement is only in one direction, the

self loses itself. We have already seen what it means when—in imagination—only an infinitizing movement occurs. And we had previously looked at what a one-sided movement of finitization involves; namely life in immediacy, where the human being, without any decision or resolve of their own, lets themselves be given the goal of their life by their capabilities and inclinations and by the order of things. Therefore if one speaks of ‘returning to oneself *infinitely* by the process of finitizing’, the emphasis must lie on the word infinite qua endless; [56] not coming to an end, but infinitely the self must come back to itself in finitude.ⁱⁱⁱ Our problem concerns this opposition: to live finitely in finitude is ‘to remain standing at the point that is immediately determined for the individual’. Infinitely to come back to oneself in finitude is to take over one’s concrete existence, which therefore takes place in a special act, in a decision or a resolution.

Now which is the self that makes the decision or forms the resolution? It certainly cannot be me myself in my concrete existence; for with that I can only live immediately. But who am I, if I am not me myself in my concrete existence—who am I, who takes on my concrete existence in a special act?

Kierkegaard’s answer now is that it is the self in the infinitizing movement, or, as he also puts it more briefly, it is the infinite self. This is contained in the determination already given. Indeed to take over one’s concrete existence is a special act; for it to take place, the individual must relate themselves to themselves, in other words to be a self or spirit with the doubling that that involves. However, a human being becomes a self or spirit only [51] through the break with immediacy that can only occur insofar as the human being relates themselves to infinity or eternity—which is why concrete existence can only be taken over with the self in its relation to infinity or eternity, only with the infinite self.

However, the act of taking over one’s own concrete existence cannot succeed if the infinite self is only a self in the infinitizing movement of imagination. For a fantastical self of this sort will not without further ado take over their concrete existence as it is; rather the person concerned will want to decide for themselves ‘what they want to include and what they do not want to include in their concrete self’. They take it upon themselves ‘first to reshape this whole [their concrete existence], [57] in order then to get a self that they want out of it’—‘and then they want to be this self’ (SKS 11: 182/KW 19: 68).

However, the infinite self is not able to form or shape the finite self. For what is the infinite self? It is ‘only the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility of the self’. It is only the bare possibility of forming the concrete self; it is, as he says, ‘a negative self’. The infinity of this self is nothing more than the infinity that lies in the—fantastical—will to be the ground of their self—to begin ‘from the beginning’, as Kierkegaard puts it (*ibid.*). But the human being is indeed not

the ground of their self. That is why, in an individual that wants to be what it is precluded from being by its own existence, the will takes the form of a desperate defiance—and this is the form of the fantastical will, to construct the concrete existence which one wants to be.

Such an attempt thus denies what Kierkegaard and Heidegger take to be the original datum of existence which is a negativity: that the individual is not the basis of their own existence. Indeed, this is what for Heidegger makes existence into an existence in ‘care’, from which all other possibilities of existence [52] arise. In the same way, it is this negativity that determines the task to be that of taking over one’s own existence, just as it is.

For Kierkegaard the human is not the ground of their own existence, for that is eternity. And the human being themselves is in fact not eternity; they relate themselves to eternity, but precisely by relating to it they are outside of it. The task is therefore to take over concrete existence, to robe oneself in it, just as it is—but take note, to take it over as the existence that has its ground in eternity.

The fantastical will to construct for oneself the concrete existence one wills to take over, is the same as wanting to be the ground of one’s own existence. In Kierkegaard’s opinion this can also [58] be expressed in the following way: that the human being wills to be their own eternity, which is therefore what the individual wills when their relation to eternity and infinity is that of the imagination alone.

In the activity of fantasizing, the human being defiantly hides from themselves the fact that they are outside eternity, by willing to be their own eternity themselves. Therefore they do not want to take on their existence just as it is. To be able to do that, the individual must face up to the fact that, in their relation to eternity, they are outside eternity.

What must the relation then be like, if they are to face up to it without losing themselves in fantasizing? It comes about in the understanding of the fact—and here we have Kierkegaard’s answer—that infinity and eternity, as such, is a demand—of the fact that infinity and eternity are God. Only if the individual understands that they are placed under an infinite and eternal demand, is it possible for them to take on their concrete existence, without them first remoulding it in accordance with what they take to be good.

Before we clarify what it now means for the individual to take over their concrete existence, we must obviously ask: what does the infinite demand consist in? It consists in this—as it is put in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*—‘to express in existing, that the individual is really capable of doing nothing themselves, [53] but is nothing before God’ (SKS 7: 418/KW 12.1: 461). There is a difference

between a human being relating themselves to an ideal and relating themselves to God. The relation to an ideal consists in a striving to become equal to it. 'But between God and a human being... there is an absolute difference; therefore the absolute relation of a human being to God must precisely express the absolute difference, and the immediate likeness will be precociousness, uncouthness, presumptuousness and so on' (SKS 7: 375/KW 12.1: 412). The expression of [59] the absolute difference is worship, which precisely means 'that God to the individual is absolutely everything' (SKS 7: 375/KW 12.1: 413)—and the human being themselves is nothing.

The human being certainly does not take themselves to be nothing in their life in immediacy—where the individual develops their capacities, satisfies their desires, and fulfils their duties—for they achieve now and then a goal that they have set themselves, and therefore achieve one thing or another. The infinite demand, in which the individual becomes nothing at all, therefore signifies a break with immediacy or—as it is also put—it is a demand to die away from immediacy.

Since the human being gets pleasure in developing their capacities, finds satisfaction in attaining the goals that they have set themselves, and in general gets along in a life inside the order of things, {and is swallowed up by this,} this therefore means that a life in obedience to the infinite demand is a life of renunciation and suffering. Kierkegaard therefore returns in almost all his writings to the point that the individual can only relate themselves to God in suffering. In contrast to misfortune, which comes to a person from outside and accidentally, suffering belongs to religiosity in an inner and enduring way, so that for better or worse it is the 'total category' of the religious (SKS 7: 396/KW 12.1: 435); 'in suffering, the religious begins to breathe' (SKS 7: 397/KW 12.1: 436). And only 'in the annihilation before God' (SKS 7: 498/KW 12.1: 548) could a cure be found for the suffering that has been produced by the absolute demand to die away from immediacy.

The infinite demand thus also has the character of an abstraction. As a demand to die away from immediacy, it is a demand [54] to abstract from the concrete; or, as Kierkegaard also says, to abstract from external existence. In earlier as well as later works, he emphasizes that the religious has infinite abstraction as a precondition. The religious opens up the infinite abyss of abstraction. The consciousness of the infinite and eternal [60] in 'fear' and 'ought' has the character of 'an infinite abstraction from everything external'. However different the abstraction of fantasizing may be from the abstraction of the infinite demand, both are nonetheless abstractions.

After Kierkegaard has portrayed the abstraction that is the content of the absolute demand—how all renounce, spurn, and sacrifice the love of God, and

how they will not let themselves be bothered, disturbed {or captivated} by anything else—he then poses the question in *Stages on Life's Way*, whether this abstraction and its pride is not then an inhumanity. Yes, he answers, it is, if the human being does not relate themselves to the concrete, with which they break and from which they die away, and does not know, love, and respect the concrete. He then moves on to talk at this point about the thought of the exception, but that cannot be further dealt with here (SKS 6: 162ff/KW 11: 173ff).

What does interest us here is that the abstraction of the absolute demand is an inhumanity, if the individual does not take on their concrete existence in and with this abstraction. Concerning this, it is therefore stated shortly before in the same place: 'The true concreteness is not easy for the religious to find, for the religious constantly has the infinite abstraction as its precondition' (SKS 6: 160/KW 11: 172). And it is added that an exact determination of the true concreteness of the religious—an example would be marriage—is simply not to be found. The author would view an example of this sort as a *pium desiderium* [pious desire]. Hence Kierkegaard allows his pseudonym of the ethical stage, Judge William, in the presentation of these stages in *Either/Or* and in the *Stages on Life's Way*, to conclude that the problem is not solved here [ibid.]. And Judge William is right. A proof of this would take us [55] too far afield at this point, and Kierkegaard's own statement that the solution is not to be found is enough for us.

In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard nonetheless comes closer to the matter, in that he establishes [61] that the infinite abstraction, the interweaving of concrete existence with the religious, should happen in an inward and not an external straightforward manner. It therefore should not happen in this way: that the human being seeks to isolate themselves from life with other human beings within the order of things, that the individual withdraws from the world, as they did in the monasteries in the Middle Ages. That would mean the individual trying to give a finite expression to the infinite abstraction, or to give their religious existence a worldly form, which is self-contradictory; for then the abstraction is no longer infinite and the religious existence is no longer religious. No, the individual can and perhaps must live like other human beings, so that purely externally no differences are to be discerned. Yes, externally the human being ought perhaps 'to apparently be capable of everything' (SKS 7: 420/KW 12.1: 462), to attain their goal and to achieve a great deal. In such a life—where the individual thus remains in the world and lives in an externally straightforward way like all the others—then the infinite abstraction before the concrete things that make up their life needs to be expressed in the inner. That means they ought to be conscious—in the infinite religious abstraction, in the inwardness of the God relation—that everything that they bring about in the

world, all the goals they attain, all the duties they discharge, all this is nothing, that they achieve nothing. The relation to the infinite demand is described in the *Postscript* as relating oneself absolutely to the absolute telos. It consists in this, that the human being in their existence ought to express that they are nothing and are capable of nothing, meaning of course an inner tearing away from all those concrete goals posited by capacities, inclinations, and duties; or to put it otherwise, meaning that the individual relates themselves relatively to the relative telos. Renunciation is not external but internal, [56] and inner renunciation consists in this, that the relative, concrete goals of the human being are not everything, but only something highly relative. [62]

{For the sake of the subsequent account, where I come to make a comparison with Heidegger, let me already here draw attention to the fact that up to this point in the development of Kierkegaard's views, there is a close parallel with the development in Heidegger's.}

On closer examination what does all this mean: living in the world with others, and letting the order of things, along with one's capacities and inclinations, posit the activity for the individual; yet at the same time, in an infinite sense, abstracting from all this and being detached from it inwardly? In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in the section that he calls an 'edifying diversion', Kierkegaard gives an example of the form such a life would take, {an example which actually shows us that such a life is impossible. Now is it also Kierkegaard's own intention to show through this example that a human being cannot take over their concrete existence in this way? It is possible, I am not sure of it. But no matter how this is to be understood, then as far as I can see,} the example is such that it raises the question, whether there is not something fundamentally wrong in Kierkegaard's presentation of the problem {which however I only come to later}.

The concrete example is the innocent pleasure of going to the public amusements in the Dyrehaven [Deer Park]—a popular excursion outside Copenhagen—and the task of now bringing that into harmony with the idea of God. If now the religious person has the desire to go to the park, they will ask themselves whether this is 'a momentary desire' or 'an immediate whim' (SKS 7: 449/KW 12.1: 495). The individual lives immediately if they follow their desire and therefore do not relate themselves to the infinite demand. It is only possible for them to do so if it serves as a distraction which they every now and then need, because they are a finite and limited human being, where God knows we need this sort of thing.

But now how should the religious person know whether it is the one or the other? In order to ascertain where the impulse comes from, they must first try to

do without it. That means therefore that the religious person—in worry and mistrust—[57] proceeds on the assumption that the impulse comes from immediacy and tries for good measure to resist it.

But now the religious person is irritable, because in doing without the distraction they ‘feel keenly the sting of being so dependent in thus having always to understand in this way that one is capable of nothing at all’ (SKS 7: 449/KW 12.1: 496). And now they become defiant—now they *will* to do without the distraction. But then, obviously, not [63] being capable of doing anything becomes something they are precisely capable of doing by their own capacity and will.

But now from this a noteworthy fact comes to the fore, when the infinite demand is a demand for annihilation. The inwardness of the relation to God is its persistence—otherwise it is indeed just a theory, ‘for the absolute idea of God does not mean to have the absolute idea in passing, but to have the absolute idea at every moment’ (SKS 7: 438/KW 12.1: 483). This means therefore that the inwardness, the persistence of the idea of God of which the religious person must be capable—for this is the very point of the infinite demand—annuls itself, just as certainly as the content of the demand that one is capable of nothing.

How does the human being get out of this difficulty? The religious insight that the human being is capable of nothing also contains the thought that they are not capable of grasping this insight in each individual moment. The human being fortifies themselves, as Kierkegaard says, with the edifying observation ‘that God, who created human beings, must know best all those many things that to the human appear impossible to bring together with the thought of God—all this earthly need, all the confusion we can be caught up in, and the necessity for distraction, for rest, as well as a night’s sleep’ (SKS 7: 443/KW 12.1: 489). ‘But part of a human being’s lowliness is being temporal and unable within temporality to lead the life of eternity uninterruptedly’ (SKS 7: 445/KW 12.1: 491). Human beings need distraction, if they are not to perish.

It is again the same difficulty, only from another direction: the idea of God, which consists in the insight that you can accomplish [58] nothing by yourself, annuls itself insofar as—taken to its logical conclusion—the insight cannot be grasped, and so cannot itself be accomplished either.

But then the question arises {and this question has to arise} for this last edifying reflection: what differentiates it from ‘a momentary pleasure, an immediate [64] idea’ {which a human being can be content with}? Now we are back where we started, and the whole thing can begin again {and has to do so}. In the same moment in which the decision to go into the park is made, everything is set up to begin again—indeed, it must be so. Religiously speaking there is nothing

that can bring this circling of self-observation to a halt, nothing that can interrupt this cycle of worry, dissolution of worry, and renewal of worry.

The difficulty derives not only from what Kierkegaard calls the sickness of human beings {namely their weakness}, but it also has a logical character. The difficulty may be due to the fact that the infinite demand for Kierkegaard does not have a determinate content, in the face of which the human being fails and before which they recognize themselves as nothing, but instead purely abstractly aims for the goal that the human being recognizes themselves as nothing.^{iv} {I shall return to this.}

Note that Kierkegaard^v can only stop this circle with an ethical veto:

If, shortly afterwards, the thought flashes through their soul that it was a mistake after all, they then simply put an ethical reflection in its path, for in the face of a decision taken on that basis of honest deliberation a fleeting thought must not play the master. The person disarms this thought ethically in order not to be driven back into the highest relationship, whereby the significance of the diversion that had been decided upon would be annihilated. (SKS 7: 450/KW 12.1: 497)

5

Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the Concept of Guilt

[65/69] What Kierkegaard understands by taking over one's concrete existence in an infinite sense—that is, in the infinite demand—must be given a further determination: it is to take over one's life as a life of total guilt.

The guilt of the individual is total in virtue of being combined with infinity as demand or, as Kierkegaard puts it, with the idea of God or the idea of an eternal blessedness. 'The totality of guilt comes about for the individual by combining their guilt, be it just one, however trivial, together with the relation to an eternal blessedness' (SKS 7: 481/KW 12.1: 529).

It is the determination of totality that the religious address deals with essentially. It can use a crime, it can use a weakness, it can use negligence, in short, whatever the particular might be, but what distinguishes the religious address as such is that it moves from this particular to the determination of totality through combining this particular with the relation to an eternal blessedness. (SKS 7: 488/KW 12.1: 537–8)

The consciousness of guilt as a determination of totality—or, what means the same thing, as qualitative determination—is contrasted with the comparative guilt consciousness—or consciousness of guilt as quantitative determination. [66]

Comparative guilt consciousness is based on the fact that one starts out from a norm, a measure, against which the amount of guilt can be determined. The guilt is determined externally and quantitatively. 'One can recognize the comparative guilt-consciousness in this way, that it has its measure outside itself' (SKS 7: 482/KW 12.1: 531).

Infinity as demand, as the idea of God, excludes any such measure and with this any such determination of the [60] amount of guilt. The combining together with the idea of God makes guilt into a qualitative determination.

But that in no way means that the totality determination is secondary. On the contrary; in order for the individual to be guilty or not guilty, the human must be totally guilty. Kierkegaard's view on this may seem odd. It would indeed be

more natural to hold that the primary thing is guilt in individual things and that guilt as total determination is secondary. The explanation for Kierkegaard's assertion of the priority of the total determination is to be found in this: that for him existence as such is a relation to infinity and eternity. A life in which the individual loses themselves in occupying themselves with the finite and relative is therefore—from the point of view of existential philosophy—founded in the life in which the individual relates to eternity; each form of existence originates in the individual literally 'losing themselves' in forgetting their relation to eternity. Correspondingly, the life in which the individual only knows guilt as it pertains to individual things first occurs when they flee from the consciousness of guilt as a total determination. These two things are intimately connected. In losing oneself in being occupied with the finite and relative, one knows only—comparatively—a finite and relative guilt, that is, guilt in individual things. In relation to eternity, by contrast, the guilt is total. [67]

One cannot understand total guilt without also getting clear about its relation to time. The existing being is already guilty as an existing being, because the least consideration of the ethical task is already an abuse of time—an abuse of existence in that time is only given to the human being in order that they may realize the ethical task. The individual is under an obligation in each single moment to realize the ethical, so that the pause to consider, in which one commits to the task, is already an abuse of time that makes the existing person guilty. Guilt therefore belongs essentially to existence as existence in time, 'even while deliberating the individual is ethically responsible for the use [61] of time... even at the moment the task is set, something has gone to waste, for there has been existence in the interim and the beginning is not made straight away' (SKS 7: 478/KW 12.1: 526).

But if responsibility consists in realizing the ethical task at every moment, so that the least reflection, indeed even the posing of the task, is guilt, then every human being knows the task for themselves, as Kierkegaard emphasizes.

The ethical presupposes that each human being knows what the ethical is, and why is this so? Because indeed the ethical demands of each human being that they realize it in every moment, therefore they must surely know it. The ethical begins not with unknowing, that ought to be changed into knowledge, but begins with knowledge and demands realization. (SKS 27: 394/KJP 1: 271)

Relatedly, the difference between the total and comparative guilt consciousness can be expressed in yet another way: in virtue of the fact that guilt in individual things in its combination with the idea of God has become total guilt, its pathos consists in a continual consciousness of guilt. The total, the essence of the guilt

consciousness, expresses itself in its steadfastness; that is what passion consists in, in steadfastness and not [68] in momentary violence. This results in the difference between the total and the comparative guilt consciousness, that while the total guilt consciousness persists, the characteristic of the comparative guilt consciousness is that 'forgetfulness comes between particular instances of guilt' (SKS 7: 491/KW12.1: 540).

Of course, this relates to the fact that it is the individual's task in every moment of temporality to gain their identity in relation to eternity. And the relationship to eternity which is determined as total guilt consciousness precisely comes about through the persistence of this guilt consciousness.

Here, however, there is a characteristic shift, the same as is shown by the 'edifying diversion', namely that the task to take over individual concrete existence with the infinite demand is impossible, not only because [62] of human inadequacy, but also purely logically, because the task has simply been wrongly posed by Kierkegaard.

The shift shows itself as follows. Guilt originally consisted in comparing the human individual with the idea of God, while total guilt now comes to consist in not being able to grasp guilt consciousness. Total guilt consists in the fickleness of the consciousness of guilt. Cut off from guilt in individual things, the total guilt consciousness comes to live its own independent life {which expresses itself as a doubling of it}. The essential, total guilt consists now in a failure of the total guilt consciousness to grasp us persistently. The crucial ethical-religious demand is not to realize the ethical, but to be constantly and persistently in total guilt consciousness.

In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard examines the assertion that 'such a recollection of guilt no human being can abide, it must lead to madness [69] or death' (SKS 7: 487/KW 12.1: 536). That may be right, he says; but then it may also be the case that God allows the individual to forget so much of their guilt that they can bear to live:

Well, all right, we know that it is not possible to survive very long on bread and water; but then a physician can judge how things should be arranged for the particular individual, not so that, please note, they come to live in excess; the starvation diet is carefully calculated to make it possible for them, yes, precisely to just about live. (Ibid.)

The existing individual will themselves 'seek to find the minimum of forgetfulness that they need, in order to endure it' (SKS 7: 487/KW 12.1: 536–7). But how can one be clear where the limits of this minimum are to be drawn? They can never be found with complete certainty; and anyway, it would be fatal, because such one hundred per cent certainty would destroy the total guilt consciousness.

This corresponds to the lasting uncertainty whether the individual has now given in too much, and has forgotten the guilt consciousness more than is strictly necessary in order to bear life:

But since it is impossible in this dialecticizing to find an absolute [63] certainty, the individual will manage, in spite of all their efforts, to have guilt consciousness totally determined again by their never having dared, in respect of an eternal blessedness, to say that they had done everything they could to grasp the recollecting of guilt.

(SKS 7: 487–8/KW 12.1: 537)

This means that according to Kierkegaard the total guilt consciousness no longer arises from guilt regarding individual things in combination with the idea of God, but rather from the uncertainty whether now the total guilt consciousness has been grasped to the right degree. The total guilt consciousness lives on itself. It is fed by its own uncertainty and not by guilt concerning individual things. One would like to say that the total guilt consciousness now lives only a pale, bloodless sham life, detached from the ethical situation—which indeed is guilt in individual things. [70]

To this presentation of the problem, which Kierkegaard calls the taking-over-of-oneself in one's concrete existence, or the infinite coming back to oneself in one's finitude {and where I am first beginning to take a stand on these ideas}, one last thing ought to be added. As concrete examples of the concrete existence that is to be taken over, Kierkegaard always mentions the following two: the agonizing difficulty of possessing a fundamental defect which has been the source of a lasting suffering, and which the individual doesn't want to take over; and having an extraordinary talent, being a genius, which the individual takes over too quickly, so that strictly speaking there is no taking over, but rather one sticks with one's immediate—and also brilliant—determination. This peculiarity of the Kierkegaardian way of posing the problem is deliberately not touched upon here. It is obvious that it has a biographical background. Purely in principle, it is not only permitted, but is in fact a duty, to take a position on a thinker without consideration of the personal background of their thought. It is different were one not to take into account the historical and polemical situation in which they acted. This is not allowed and would indeed be uncalled for. One is not allowed to abstract from the battle-front of thoughts, since this is part of their meaning. But it is part of the subject matter to abstract from [64] the biographical, particularly when the thinker under consideration, as in Kierkegaard's case—at least as concerns the majority of his publications—did this himself. What matters here is the universal human problem of how—if extraordinary power of speech is not given to it, and even if it does not suffer from a fundamental

defect, a stake in the flesh—concrete existence is penetrated by its relation to infinity and eternity.

Before we go on to assess Kierkegaard's view, let us see how Heidegger gets to this point too. [71]

As we said in the previous chapter, Heidegger too poses the question how the relation to the absolute, which he calls the relation to death, penetrates concrete existence. Heidegger too asks about the repercussions of the fact that the relation to radicality that is death is such that its possibility is not related to its realization. Because now the human being thereby lets death come and breathe down their neck, they are thereby forced to live as an individual, or to be true to their existence in their essence as becoming and possibility, so that the question can be divided into two.

The first question is: what does it mean to live in their concrete existence as an individual? To this Heidegger's answer is that it in no way means to isolate themselves or to withdraw from the world; it does not consist in an attempt—that is anyway hopeless—to give their life a different structure or to exchange the circle of people in which they live for something else. For living life as an individual means to take over one's own existence such as it simply is given—but, let us note, as an existence in which the individual is abandoned to himself. That means to take over life in its given structure as a life that can only be lived together with other people—but to live it in word and deed, in silence and in activity as one's own responsibility. The parallel with Kierkegaard is obvious.

Heidegger further makes clear that the consequence of this must be that the words and deeds that result from life with others must thereby be determined in such a way that the others—each for [65] themselves—also have the task to live their life as their own responsibility. The same consequence plays an extraordinary role in the thought of Kierkegaard. To dwell on this further would take us too far afield; but it is this consequence that leads him [72] to put such an emphasis on the dialectic of communication or indirect communication.

The other question is: what does it mean for the individual to remain true in their concrete existence to the character of their existence as becoming and possibility, so that the individual does not become fixated on the realized, whether it belongs to the past or the future? Heidegger's response is that one has to get clear that no decision can have validity outside of its situation. And this does not mean a determinate type of situation, under which the many individual historical situations can fall. On the contrary, one's own situation means the single, historically unique situation, that places the human being in the decision situation. With this individual situation, the decision is passed. To hold oneself to the decision, allowing oneself to dispense once and for all with decision making

for similar situations with which one will be presented, is the same as holding to the realized and handing oneself over to the crowd's understanding of life, betraying the character of one's own existence as possibility and becoming. Heidegger says that the point is that one keeps oneself free and open, in order at any time to be able to pull back the decision one has in fact made. Of course, that does not mean that nothing is obligating in a decision, so that one can disregard it at any time. If that were so, one could only be loyal to the character of existence and becoming and possibility, by being disloyal to everything else in an existence that would then dissolve itself wholly in disjointedness. There can of course be no question of that. A decision can very well obligate me for the rest of my life. What Heidegger wants to say about this is that the obligating involves the decision being repeated—in new decisions in situations that are temporally, historically new, however much they resemble the situations that have happened. One thing is the continuity [73] that is gained [66] through the becoming of existence in the repetition; another is the fossilizing of existence that comes in when one holds oneself to what has at one time been decided and for this purpose turns the situation into something permanent and established. The point is that each decision is known to be always only temporary, even the decision that obligates me for my whole life, because the obligation is an obligation to repetition.

Heidegger's analysis can to a large degree be translated into Kierkegaard's terminology—and vice versa. To allow the possibility of death—which is absolute because it does not relate to a realization—to breathe down one's neck (what Heidegger calls 'forerunning resolution') is indeed to relate absolutely to the absolute telos. And that means that all possibilities that relate to a realization become finite for the individual or, otherwise expressed, that the individual relates themselves relatively to the relative end.

The parallel can indeed be developed further. Looked at from the perspective of the absolute possibility of death, taking on one's own existence also means, for Heidegger, that one takes it on in total guilt.

According to Heidegger, there are two moments of oneself 'being guilty'. The first is the moment of negativity, and the second the moment of being the ground of something. 'Being guilty' is to be the ground of a being in its negative determination.

As far as the second moment goes, it is without doubt the guilty person who is the ground of the negative. But the negative can equally well be in and for itself something outside their existence, of which they have made themselves guilty, as it can be their own existence in guilt.

The most obvious thing seems to be that what makes the existence of the guilty person negative is the negativity outside their existence, for which the

guilty person is the ground. Their own existence [74] is negatively determined as guilt through the negative outside themselves, of which the guilty person is ground. The negative, for which the individual guilty person is the ground, would have to determine retrospectively the existence of the guilty person themselves as negative.

However, in this way we only reach the vulgar concept of guilt. Right now people who are lost in the 'one' are thinking about being guilty. In what does the [67] negative consist outside the individual existence of the guilty person, to which they are the ground? It consists in the fact that something is lacking that should have been. That means the negative (outside the existence of the guilty person themselves) is as a defect negative in relation to a demand, which was directed to the guilty person, or in relation to a law that applies to them. In short, being guilty in the vulgar sense, that is, being guilty of something in the face of other people, is to be the source of a lack in the other person's existence through a lack in oneself, insofar as one has not fulfilled one of the demands that results from our life with others. This is guilt in the ethical and in the juridical sense.

But what now is wrong, or at least superficial, in this concept of guilt? This becomes clear when we observe that each demand, each law is something objective, something present at hand, as Heidegger puts it, just like the lack that is caused by violation of the demand or disobedience against the law. Thus, if the individual's own existence is to be determined as something negative—measured by an objective demand or a law—so then in this measure the existence of the guilty person will also be seen as something objective, something present at hand. But that is precisely not the case.

The existence of the individual cannot be measured by something that *is not* in the same way as the individual *is*—but neither a demand nor a law *is* in that way; they have no existence, as the human being does, but are rather [75] something objective. But if one nonetheless were to measure the existence of a human being in reference to something objective, an objective demand, and if one were to note a lack of which the person concerned is the ground because of being deaf to a demand, in order then to determine retrospectively their guilt as a lack in their existence, then they would be conceived of as something objective; because only something objective can have a lack. Guilt as guilt of existence can therefore not be determined through a subtraction of that to which it was the ground; it cannot be determined as cause of a lack or as the failure to hear a demand.

It must be the other way round. In order to be guilty in the ethical or juridical sense, in order to incur [68] guilt in a particular case through an action or omission, the human being as an existing being must already be guilty. What it is to be guilty must only be able to be determined through the structure of

existence itself. As Heidegger puts it: 'The idea of guilt is not one which could be thought up arbitrarily and forced upon the existing [*Dasein*]. If any understanding of the essence of guilt is possible at all, then this possibility must have been already present in the existing [*Dasein*] beforehand' (*Being and Time* [Division II, §58]).

Now in what does the original phenomenon of guilt consist? In what does guilt consist as an ontological phenomenon, that is, as it is given with the being of the human being themselves—in contrast to the vulgar, the ethical, and the juridical understanding of guilt? Heidegger's answer to this is that it is given with existence as care, as 'cura'. The original phenomenon of guilt is based on the decisive peculiarity of human existence: that we ourselves are the ground of everything we undertake or do not undertake, without being the ground of our lives. Without ever having given ourselves life, without being able to even for a single instant—that is, without being [76] sovereign over ourselves for a single second—we must take over, which is to say take on responsibility for, everything that we are and do. Without myself being the ground of the fact *that* I am, I can only exist because I am the ground of being *what* I am. In the act of taking over, the self comes (as it were) subsequent to the possibilities of its life and subsequent to the ground of its existence, so that it—in the act of taking over—depends only on this, existing from the ground and as the ground of its own existence.

Insofar as the existence that is taken over, is an existence in possibilities, existing means already to be placed in, or to have placed oneself in, one possibility or another. Therefore to the act of taking over belongs the negativity of having excluded oneself from other possibilities, either through not choosing them, or through not being able to choose any other possibilities. To take over one's own existence as ground of this negative—that is, to take over one's own existence of which one is not master, precisely because it is an existence one has taken over—means to take over the guilt that belongs to existence itself. [69]

Guilt as ontological phenomenon therefore consists in two things: firstly, it consists in the fact that the human being, lost to life in the crowd, because of the character of existence initially and mostly as care, has not chosen the other possibility, namely to live as an individual; secondly, this guilt consists in not being able to do or to undertake anything without excluding other forms of being or activity, that would otherwise be possible in the situation. This is not the truism that we always can only do one thing; it means that we are not able to do anything, without thereby at the same time and for always omitting to do something else that the situation has in other ways made possible. Whatever in the given situation and in the instant of the activity has [77] been excluded

through the one thing that we do, can never again be made up later. We can never again be in this situation, because our life is a life in time; in this consists the finitude of our lives.

However, the individual can only attain complete clarity about this—that they are guilty as an existing being, that is, that they are guilty, as long as they live—if in living they think of their own existence to the end. If this is not to be a matter of recognizing this or that guilt, but rather taking on one's existence as essentially and always guilty, then one has to be concerned with one's own existence in its totality—but existence is total only as an existence towards death. The negativity that rules the whole of existence is only completely uncovered in its determination towards death. For this reason, the presupposition of the fact that the individual understands guilt in an original way—that guilt is their existence as such—lies in their taking over existence as determined towards death.

The determinations of guilt therefore become accentuated through the determination of death. Like death, guilt cuts all ties to the other; like death, guilt isolates the individual absolutely from the other. The individual can just as little lay guilt to one side as they can death; it comes before any moral or juridical guilt and remains after the debts of any moral and juridical guilt have been paid. [70]

Because the human being is already guilty as existing, they can now also incur guilt in the factual realm—that is to say, ethical and juridical guilt. But the moral cannot determine what guilt originally is, because guilt as an ontological phenomenon is the precondition for moral good and evil. The human being does not first become guilty through mistakes and omissions, but is already guilty as existing.

This original guilt is hidden, shrouded in the lostness of the human being in the crowd, as 'one', where they only know themselves as someone who either satisfies the rules, [78] norms, measures, or ideal at hand, or does not. The individual flees from their original guilt, in order to speak of guilt and innocence that can be calculated and compensated for. Indeed, guilt in the original sense is not a lack in relation to this or that ideal that has been imposed on us, but lies before any ideal in our existence itself. And it is this original guilt that the calling of conscience makes comprehensible and to which it calls the individual back. Conscience calls the individual to take over their existence as existence in guilt; for a human being is always in each action guilty, because they do not do anything and cannot do anything about the fact that they have forever omitted something, by doing something else instead. To be willing to hear conscience means to commit to the precondition, given with our existence, of incurring guilt

in the factual, ethical, and juridical realms, which is based on the fact that we are not for a single instant sovereign over our lives.

To finally take a closer look here at the relation between the thought of Kierkegaard and that of Heidegger, it is clear without further discussion that they agree on two decisive points. What Heidegger calls ethical or juridical guilt corresponds precisely to the concept of comparative guilt consciousness in Kierkegaard. According to Heidegger, ethical and juridical guilt is based on the fact that our joint life {, our life together with one another,} yields a series of norms that impose a series of corresponding, determined, [71] and calculable—that is to say quantitative—demands on the individual. As calculable and quantitative, they demand individual, determinate actions or omissions—that the guilty person thus has not achieved.

This precisely corresponds to what Kierkegaard calls comparative guilt, by which he indeed understands a guilt whose extent can [79] be calculated, because it consists in one not following the demands to which the determinate norms give rise. Incidentally, the second meaning of the word ‘comparative’ follows from this, namely that one compares oneself to others. It is when guilt is a quantitative magnitude—because it is measured according to a quantitative demand for determinate acts or omissions—that the individual is in the position to compare themselves with others, whether they are more or less guilty than this person or another.

Yet more striking however is the agreement in their discussion of the grounding relation. In order to be able to be guilty as an individual, as Kierkegaard puts it, or in order to succumb to juridical or moral guilt, as Heidegger puts it, the individual must be totally guilty, they must be already guilty as existing. Just as Kierkegaard claims total guilt has priority, so Heidegger claims the same, that guilt in a proper sense is given with existence, that it is an ontological phenomenon.

But here the similarity ends. While for Kierkegaard essential guilt has an ethico-religious character, for Heidegger it is an ontological phenomenon.

6

The Absolute Demand of Concrete Existence

[80/72] To move on now to an evaluation of these views—and in the first instance, those of Kierkegaard—the question is whether his claim about the infinite demand is tenable. This is not a matter of whether it is tenable to speak of an infinite demand under which the individual as bare existent is placed, but of whether the path that Kierkegaard takes over the infinite abstraction of concrete existence, in order to come to clarity regarding the infinite demand, is passable and leads to its goal.¹ If it is not, then it is not in any way surprising that the task of taking over their concrete existence with the infinite demand becomes logically impossible.

Kierkegaard says himself in the previously cited passage from *Stages in Life's Way* that: 'The true concreteness is not easy for the religious to find, for the religious constantly has the infinite abstraction as its precondition' [SKS 6: 160/ KW 6: 172]. It is not only not easy to find, but it is impossible. Kierkegaard has posited an abyss [73] between the infinite demand and concrete existence that he himself cannot get over. And what causes this abyss? Is it the powerlessness of the individual, their misery? Is it that the individual only becomes spirit in spiritlessness, only a self in self-seeking, and only free in the misuse of freedom, that creates the abyss? That is exactly how it is—and as a result the task of taking up their concrete existence is [81] in fact impossible; it is therefore an historical fact that the individual cannot solve the task. But there is more to it than that, according to Kierkegaard: the abyss is posited through an abstraction, and therefore we stand before a task that is impossible in principle and logically, to take over our own individual existence. Here lies the error in Kierkegaard's presentation of the problem.

What the demand consists in is deduced from its mere infinity. For indeed the demand consists in this, that the individual is placed under the demand of infinity in the finitude of their concrete existence, knowing that they are nothing. This is precisely what can be derived from the mere infinity of the demand, and it

is the only thing that can be derived from it. Seen from the perspective of the infinite, the finite is nothing, and as long as infinity is demand, the demand—considered only as infinite—has to consist in this, that what is finite comes to know its nothingness.

The method Kierkegaard used to gain clarity regarding what the infinite demand consists in, on closer investigation, is analogous to the method of Kant, which he uses to make clear what the moral law consists in. It is the law of reason itself and must as such be universal. The meaning of the law, the ethical demand, is what Kant derives from its mere universality as a law that has its source in reason: you ought only to act on such rules or maxims, Kant says, of which you {can} will that they shall be universal laws. The moral law does not get its content from concrete existence, rather it wants to assert its universality. Correspondingly for Kierkegaard, the infinite demand [74] does not get its content from concrete existence, but asserts only its own infinitude.

For Kierkegaard it is therefore not that the infinite demand has a different content from the finite; the difference [82] consists in the fact that the finite demand has a content while the infinite demand has none. {In its contentlessness, the infinite demand consists solely in the individual's annihilation before God.} What brings to consciousness the infinite demand, and the knowledge that one is capable of nothing, is therefore a failure in the face of a finite demand. It is a 'crime', a 'weakness', an 'omission' [SKS 7: 488/KW 12.1: 537], that is, a failure in the face of a finite, juridical, or moral demand, which occasions the knowledge that the human being is capable of nothing, because this failure is put together with the infinite demand. It is guilt for particular matters, as a comparative amount, as 'crime', 'weakness', and 'omission', which becomes total insofar as it is combined with the idea of God. The transition from the finite to the infinite demand is therefore in Kierkegaard not so much a radicalization of responsibility and correspondingly of guilt, as an exponentiation of the consciousness of responsibility and of the consciousness of guilt.

On closer investigation, there is no essential relation between the finite and the infinite demand; at an essential level the ethical and juridical demand has nothing to do with the infinite demand, which is exclusively religious; indeed the infinite demand consists in this, that the individual in their finitude ought to know that they are capable of nothing. The finite, the ethical, and juridical demand, and the failure of the human being in the face of it, is only the occasion for this. If, therefore, the ethical and juridical demand, and the failure of the individual in the face of it, were only the occasion to bring about the relation to the infinite demand in total guilt, then in and for itself the occasion can simply fall by the wayside; only too easily can it slip out of view, and then the total guilt

consciousness lives its own life. Ethical and juridical responsibility and guilt are not included in total responsibility and [75] total guilt, but remain outside them; for the infinite demand and its total [83] guilt, in which the individual relates to it, is exclusively religious. The ethical and the religious slip away from one another. The ethical is reduced to becoming the mere occasion of the religious life.

To put this a little less abstractly: the finite, ethical, and juridical demand is a relation between two parties, two human beings, namely the one that has committed wrong and the one that has suffered wrong. If someone who has committed wrong combines their guilt together with the infinite demand, with the idea of God, then their guilt becomes total; but then at the same time this other person, against whom wrong has been committed, is completely eliminated. Total guilt gives rise to an exclusively religious relation between the individual guilty person and the infinite demand of God, in which the other person, against whom the wrong is committed, is not included. Once the person against whom the wrong has been committed has established a religious relation between the guilty person and the infinite demand or God, they slip completely out of the picture.

{Why?} In the infinite demand there is no place for the wrong against that person. For the infinite demand is contentless; it is only known through infinite abstraction from concrete existence. It cannot contain something which is as determined by its content as responsibility for another human being or guilt with respect to another human being. Indeed, in its contentlessness it aims exclusively at the annihilation of the individual before God. The infinite demand in its contentlessness, in its infinite abstraction from concrete existence, is precisely an expression of the exclusivity of the religious relation.

The comparative guilt that a human being incurs by committing ethical or juridical wrong is a relation between two parties. Following Kierkegaard's line of thought, the transition from comparative to total guilt consists not in the fact that a relation between two changes into a relation between three, but that a [84] two-place relation is taken over by another two-place relation; the first, [76] the ethical or juridical relation, is replaced by {an exclusively} religious relation.

The true concreteness is not easy for the religious to find, for the religious constantly has the infinite abstraction as its precondition. This exclusivity manifests itself as the total guilt consciousness—removed from guilt in the ethical and juridical sense, removed from the ethical situation—having a life of its own; this means that the individual is not able to hold on to it, as we have just seen. Total guilt consists in the individual being unable to be persistent in the consciousness of their total guilt. In other words, total guilt is the fact that the individual does not live persistently in consciousness of their own nothingness.

It must thus happen, because indeed the infinite demand has no determinate content, that in comparison the individual always comes off worst, which has the consequence that the individual would have to recognize that they are capable of nothing and are nothing in comparison to this specific infinite demand. Through its lack of a determinate content, the infinite demand solely consists in this: that the individual become conscious that they are nothing and are capable of nothing. The infinite nature of the demand is a demand for the infinite intensification of the consciousness of guilt; it has nothing to do with a radicalization of the content of the finite demand. The demand is for sheer infinity; it is not a determinate demand that proves to be infinite by virtue of its content.

{Detachment from the ethical situation meant as mentioned that the total consciousness of guilt feeds on itself, from the uncertainty about whether it had grasped itself sufficiently. Thus a doubling takes place. But here we are no longer talking about the doubling which belongs to just any spiritual relation, but here there is a doubling squared, so to speak. Doubling that belongs to any spiritual relation consisted of course of that relationship to myself as existing, as the demand put me in the situation where I thereby had to make a decision. The doubling was thus due to the fact that it was about my existence and was determined in contrast to consciousness's reflexivity, where it was merely recognition. But here, [77] where the total consciousness of guilt feeds on itself, it is the relation that relates itself to itself; I am here not just something conscious, as I reflexively relate myself to my relation to this something, but consciousness relates itself to itself. The spiritual relation's doubling that arises where it applies to existence, here moves over into the pure consciousness.}

Here the question necessarily arises, whether it is possible to talk of the infinite demand in a different way from Kierkegaard. One can indeed ask: are we not posed with the alternative, either to give up all thought of an infinite, an absolute, and unconditioned demand—or to put up with the difficulties that are present in Kierkegaard's account? The critique that has been levelled here [85] against Kierkegaard therefore obliges us—if we do not want to give up all thought of the infinite demand and thereby reject all of Kierkegaard's understanding of existence—to clarify whether the infinite demand announces itself in {the individual's} concrete, external existence. {It seems to me that in fact this is what it does.} We shall now try to illustrate this.

Every day a whole series of spoken or unspoken demandsⁱⁱ are put to us, which are such that the other is completely within their rights to make them. These are namely the demands that are conditioned by the norms and standards that arise from our lives with {and against} one another. They are therefore well-grounded

demands, of which the other is conscious and that they are able to formulate in the circumstances, or of which at any rate they could have been conscious and could have been able to formulate.

They are thus the demands that are defined through the norms of social life. The other must therefore, if the demand is to be valid, document the agreement of the demand with the norms of this life. How far one now goes into the detail of the determination of the demand is immensely variable. The more one goes into detail, [78] the more the demand—in its external legality—consists in the performance and omission of individual determinate actions. The less one goes into detail, the more the focus lies on individual judgement. Through ignoring these demands and the wrong one thereby does to the other, the human being incurs what Kierkegaard and Heidegger call a comparative, a quantitatively calculable, guilt.

But there is also a demand that exceeds what the other person may legitimately demand. It is not a demand that can be verified, as the previous one can, or that announces itself violently as punishment for whoever is not willing to comply. By contrast, it is a demand whose existence can only be asserted, proclaimed, and taken up. It neither has its origins in the norms [86] of social life, nor is it conditioned through them; rather, it is given with the existence of the other person themselves. It therefore does not specify in greater or lesser detail what I ought to do. Just as the demand is given with the bare existence of the other, so is it correspondingly directed at me in my bare existence.

What does that mean? It does not mean that what is demanded of me are more or less determinate actions that can be defined within valid morality and existing law, in such a way that everything would be in order as long as I have acted accordingly, leaving me free to serve myself in all the deeds and words which our relation occasions, should I so choose. Rather, it means that everything that our relationship with one another gives me occasion to say and do must happen in the service of the other, and not for my own sake.

Where does a human being hear such a demand? Must not an individual, as Kierkegaard says, abstract infinitely from their concrete existence in order to be able to stand under such an absolute demand? The answer to this is: no! Quite the contrary, the individual hears the demand in their concrete existence. [79] In which situation, under which circumstances? In responsibility, for having responsibility for another person means that everything that the bearer of the responsibility says and does in this interrelation ought to be said and done for the other and not for their own sake.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, it means that the other ought to be served with word and deed, with silence and the omission of deeds; indeed, because the demand is given with the bare existence of the other and is directed

towards me in my bare existence, the words and deeds are not defined at the outset, but must be determined from situation to situation by responsibility. Thus the remarkable thing here is that surely the absolute demand has content by virtue of being given with the fact of responsibility, but that the content is not so constituted [87] that it determines the appearance of concrete words and of concrete deeds from the outset. This latter is the case with the finite, the conditioned demand, whose conditions are a range of circumstances that prefigure the situation for which they are valid, and which should trigger this or that determinate action or word. This prefiguring, as we saw, can be more or less detailed; the more detailed, the judgement of the individual is less important; the more individual judgement is decisive, so the more the individual is involved in what they say and do. By contrast, the absolute demand, the demand of the responsibility relation itself, turns on the existence of the individual in their totality. The demand of responsibility commandeers the self.

Responsibility is never only a relation between two; each relation of responsibility is a relation between three. To be responsible is to have responsibility for an other and equally to be responsible to a third. We have the responsible person, the person for whom the responsible person has responsibility, and also, to put it briefly, the authority. That which—or who—says ‘you shall [*sollst*]’ to the responsible person is not primarily the one for whom the responsible person has [80] the responsibility, but rather the one to whom the responsible person is responsible—namely the authority. So for example children, for whom parents have responsibility, are precisely not those to whom parents are responsible.

However, we are not just talking of a responsibility which turns on the responsibility relation as such, one which seeks to make the existence of the responsible person an existence for the sake of the other, for whom the responsible person bears responsibility. Rather, we speak also of responsibility in the figurative sense as the taking on of determinate definite actions that are performed or omitted by us. In the latter case the third, to which [88] the responsible person is responsible, are the norms of social life. To this extent an authority is involved to which the other can appeal. The other can in the name of the authority say ‘you shall’ to me, because they have the right to take for granted that we are agreed over the authority. It is precisely, as one says, valid morality and prevailing law. It is—in the wider sense of the word—convention. The demand of the other is grounded.

But here, as already said, we are only talking about responsibility in an inauthentic sense. Its demands are objective; they can indeed be determined and defined; they are ‘present at hand’ as Heidegger says; they are there in a different way from the way in which the human being is also there.^{iv} Here the

existence of the individual is thus measured by something that is not there in the same way as they themselves are there—and that is why it is a matter here of responsibility in an inauthentic sense.

Indeed, as was said, the other only has the right to make demands of me on their own behalf that are conditioned and grounded in this authority, in the moral and legal norms that result from our living together in social forms. By contrast the other has no right to make the ungrounded demand, the absolute demand of the responsibility relation itself, that everything that I say and do in our reciprocal relation ought to be for their sake and not for my sake. The other cannot in their affairs make this demand of me, for it [81] is not a demand about which we have agreed; here there is no convention, no ‘what is valid’ and ‘what prevails’, from which we might proceed. What the demand aims for in its unconditionality is exclusively a matter of responsibility and of the absolute demand. The other, for whom I have responsibility, cannot here identify themselves with the authority, in such a way that the authority and their own ‘you shall’ directed to me then coincide. Neither can they appeal to any community that is given with social [89] life and without which neither their nor my life could exist.

Just because the absolute demand makes itself felt in responsibility—in {if you like} the contact of responsibility relations with other human beings for whom the individual has responsibility—so it cannot be said thereby that the individual therefore disappears in a community and stops being an individual. On the contrary! The demand is indeed not a demand that the other utters, and to which I am obliged to conform. If that were the case, then the responsibility would institute a community, which would swallow up the individual as effectively as does life in the crowd. But that is not what we are talking about here; it is on the contrary the existence of the other that poses the demand.

Hence, while the action of the responsible person ought to concern the well-being of the other and not their own, insight into what serves the other is that of the responsible person and not that of the other. It is indeed entirely possible that the insight of the responsible person is completely different from what the other finds desirable, and that it contradicts the opinion of the other concerning the responsibilities of the responsible person. So Kierkegaard says for example in *Works of Love*:

If your beloved or friend asks something of you that you, precisely because you loved honestly, had in concern considered would be harmful to them, then you must bear a responsibility if you love by obeying, instead of loving by refusing, fulfilment of the desire... If you can perceive what is best for them better than they can, you will not be excused because the harmful thing was their own desire, was what they themselves asked [82] for. [SKS 9: 27–8/KW 16: 19–20]

That means: responsibility for the other does not involve being responsible to them. It is not the other for whom I have responsibility that ought to determine my words and deeds, so that their insight ought to silence mine. [90] Also it is not the other for whom I have responsibility that shall pass judgement on whether my words and works now thereby really serve them. That would indeed mean handing over responsibility for the other to the other. That would not be to have responsibility for the other, but something completely different, namely to make oneself into a tool of the other through irresponsibility. It would be the same as going under in the crowd, although the crowd in this case would be only *one* other human being.

On the contrary, the characteristic of the demand of the responsibility relation is this: although the demand is given with the existence of the other human being and the other has been imposed on the responsible person, still this demand makes the responsible person into an individual, which isolates them ethically. When something isolates, then this is indeed the situation: one is compelled through responsibility to act precisely contrary to the wants and desires of the person for whom one is responsible.

In the highest concrete existence of responsibility the individual is made into an individual, isolated in the ethical sense because the demand is absolute. The responsibility relation is thereby expressed as a relation between three. Responsibility isolates the responsible person in an ethical way, in that it confronts them with the authority as the infinite demand. We do not first need (as Kierkegaard holds) to pass over from the finite to the infinite demand with the help of infinite abstraction.

In becoming infinite, and in becoming ungrounded and unconditioned from being grounded and conditioned, the finite demand receives a new content. Or it is the new content that changes the demand from finite to infinite, from grounded to ungrounded, from conditioned to unconditioned. The content is [83] no longer what each owes the other or others according to the norms of social life. The content is responsibility itself in [91] its totality: the responsibility that everything in the relation to the other human being, for which the responsible person has responsibility, is brought about in words and deeds, and these words and deeds have to be said and done for the sake of the other and not for one's own sake.

It is therefore—to use Kant's terminology—a universal law, but without being, as with Kant, formal—for it is material. It has a highly concrete content.

It is—to apply Kierkegaard's terminology—an infinite demand; but not a demand that announces itself first in an exclusively religious relation of infinite abstraction from concrete existence, and that therefore has no concrete content.

On the contrary, it is that which as infinite demand in the responsibility relation announces its concrete existence as a contentful demand.

We all more or less accept the finite, well-grounded, and conditioned demands and are in general also more or less capable of fulfilling them. But with the absolute demand of the responsibility relation it is completely different. It is a demand that we only come to know in guilt, just as we come to know responsibility only as a threatening accusation: it is imposed on the individual as a load and burden.

While the guilt which the individual incurs when they do not follow the finite and well-grounded demands is a comparative guilt, which is quantifiable and balanced, by contrast the guilt in which the individual acknowledges the absolute demand of the responsibility relation is total. But the decisive point here is that total guilt lies in a radicalization of the content of the demand—in opposition to Heidegger and Kierkegaard.

Neither Kierkegaard nor Heidegger rests with a relation of guilt as a relation between two human beings in which the one commits a wrong and the other [92] has suffered a wrong, and that can be determined [84] by the norms, standards, and values that they acknowledge with good will or reluctantly. A guilt that is based on the fact that the person who has been wronged has the right to pose definite demands becomes a guilt that can be measured and invites everyone to compare themselves thoughtlessly with the other person. But this quantitative and comparative guilt is put aside in order to reach guilt as a total determination, whereby the relation to other human beings is also simply abandoned. This happens both in Kierkegaard and in Heidegger, irrespective of how different their determination of total guilt may be in other ways. Kierkegaard skips over the relation to the other human being, by making total guilt into an exclusive relation between God and the individual, where the idea of God prevents any determination of the extent of guilt. And Heidegger does it by making total guilt into an ontological phenomenon, that the individual, because they are not the master of their own existence, but must take it over, can do nothing without leaving something else undone.

However, for neither of them does the transition from quantitative and comparative guilt to total guilt mean a radicalizing of the demand and with this of the content of the guilt. For Heidegger this is ruled out, because his philosophy is conceived as ontology, which only investigates human existence in its formal structure and refrains from any determination of content. For Kierkegaard it is ruled out because for him the religious consciousness posits an abyss of infinite abstraction between itself and concrete existence.

For Heidegger total guilt cannot be determined by a demand. Total guilt must rather be a determination of existence itself in its becoming and its possibility; it must be an ontological phenomenon, [93] as he puts it. But each demand of the

ethical or juridical kind is by contrast for Heidegger something objective, something present at hand. If human existence is measured by an objective demand of this sort, human existence is also grasped as something objective, which is not sufficient for the objective [85] demand. Total guilt therefore cannot be determined in relation to a demand, because it is not something objective, something present at hand. This thought in Heidegger presupposes that there are only finite, grounded, and conditioned demands.

However, the absolute demand is not objective, not present at hand. It is indeed not finite but rather infinite, ungrounded. In the demand, the existence of human beings is not grasped as something objective, something present at hand; on the contrary, the demand fuels an awareness that the existence of human beings is becoming and possibility; indeed its infinitude prevents human beings committing themselves to something realized.

It is necessary to depart from a common conception of the difference between the finite and the infinite or radical demand, according to which the finite demand requires certain determinate and isolated actions, while the infinite makes its demand of the human being as such.

We cannot determine all^v finite demands in this latter manner, for such individual acts can be carried out just as well whether or not the human being themselves is involved in the carrying out; indeed such demands can be carried out blindly. Nonetheless, in general this is not the case for the demands that are required in the determinate particular relations in which we stand to one another, as parent and child, as spouse, as teacher and pupil, as worker and employer, and so on. On the contrary, in these cases [94] the demand must be grasped with understanding. Insight is required in order to bring up children, to live in a marriage, to be a good employer and so on. It is not enough to know the demand as a form of words—as a rule there are hardly any definitive formulations—as if this could be automatically followed (as it were) in corresponding actions. The demand can only be complied with following the individual's judgement, which is why it requires insight. And because a personal judgement is necessary, the whole person must participate in the realization of the law. Without personal judgement, and so by only observing the letter of the law, following one reading of the letter of the law or another, an action which only obeys the letter of the law may just as well be an action which [86] completely opposes the spirit of the law. The human being must—in personal judgement—immerse themselves in action, filled with the spirit of the law.

Now in what does the finitude of the demand consist? In the fact that it involves something that ought to be carried out or achieved that is not generally possible without the human being themselves being involved.

Furthermore, the finitude of the demand consists in this, that the individual who is the object of the demand may keep the deeds required of them for themselves. The finite demand does not take the deeds away from them—not even when the demand requires their sacrifice and dedication; rather it requires keeping their dedication as their own dedication, and their sacrifice as their own sacrifice. And if the demand also requires that the individual must give up their life, the stake in death is their own. By losing their life, they may keep the stake—in the remembrance of them by others. Even the demand that requires an heroic death is a finite demand.

Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love* of sacrifice that receives its reward, even if this reward is only that of being understood and applauded. There is [95] for example the sacrifice that the 'home and fatherland' (as he puts it) requires.

One is willing to sacrifice this or that and everything, but one still hopes to be understood and thereby to remain in a connectedness of meaning with people, who must acknowledge one's sacrifices and rejoice in them. One is willing to forsake everything, but one still does not expect as a result to become forsaken by language and people's understanding. The movement of sacrifice accordingly becomes specious; it makes a show of forsaking the world, but still remains within the world... It climbs to a high place, inasmuch as, humanly speaking, sacrifice does indeed stand high; it casts off everything in order to climb to this elevated place, the height of which admiration notices, while the sacrifice sees that it is seen. [*Works of Love*, SKS 9: 134/KW 16: 131] [87]

By contrast, the infinite radical demand requires nothing determinate. There is no goal posited that must be attained, it does not depend on a fortunate arrangement of relations. Everything is to be discovered by the person to whom the radical demand is addressed. Nothing finite is demanded in the radical demand. The infinitude of the demand consists in this, that it solely demands the human being themselves—indeed in a direct, radical sense! As we have said, the demand aims for this, that nothing of what the individual says or does, or whether they are silent or refrain from acting, happens for the individual's sake, but rather everything is for the best of the other human being for whom they have responsibility. And mind you in the radical sense, that the deed and word, the silence or the omission with which the other is served and helped, also ought to be gifted to the other. The radical, the infinite demand is addressed directly to the self; the individual ought to serve the other with their whole self, which means completely, so that not even the service is kept as their own, but rather is gifted to the other. The infinite demand consists of the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. [96]

The main criticism of Kierkegaard that has been developed up to now is that through infinite abstraction he destroys every connection between the infinite

demand and concrete existence. By contrast, it is claimed here that the infinite demand itself—if one accepts it as such at all—announces itself precisely in concrete existence.

Let us go into this in somewhat more detail. Responsibility is no free-floating relation, under which the individual needs to place themselves or not place themselves at their own discretion. Responsibility is a relation in which the individual always already simply finds that they are placed. The individual always already bears responsibility in different relations, whether they want it or not. The individual is responsible in this way, because they have neither given life to themselves nor ordered it. The human being [88] is born into a life with a determinate order of things that claim them in such a way that when they grow up they are bound through this order in responsibility relations to other people. Our nature is ordered, its order is determined for our life with and against one another; we are, as it were, forced on each other in a way that makes us responsible.

The fact that the relation of responsibility is given with the order of things belongs with our concrete existence and calls for a distinction between two kinds of demand.

First there are the finite and well-grounded demands that the order of things—or the existing, as Kierkegaard also calls it—places upon anyone who wants to live inside this order. These are therefore the demands that arise from the norms of social life, valid morality, and prevailing law, of which we have already spoken.

This order of things is not the same from people to people, or through all time. [97] It is changeable. For even though it has its basis in the nature of human beings, as is obvious for example in the order of marriage and the family, nonetheless we give these orders a determinate cultural form; they are therefore just as much determined by the characteristics of a people as by historical tradition.

Furthermore, it is a form of lawfulness that is given with the natural basis and the culturally shaped relations themselves, and which imposes itself on us with necessity. These are laws that must be respected if we want to live in and maintain the order of things.

In addition, it is especially characteristic of our time that the laws that are given with the natural foundation and the cultural shape of these relations are increasingly the object of scientific investigation. By analysis one tries to ascertain which laws are valid in these relationships; depending on the kind of relationship, these laws are biological, pedagogical, political, or economic. [89] Thus the norms and standards that result from our living together, in short the morality that is in force, are made the object of scientific critique. To give one example: the

morality in force in the area of upbringing, and which for centuries governed the authoritarian upbringing for a child, has been subjected to a scientific critique from the perspective of modern pedagogy. Among other things, it is claimed that the earlier authoritarian upbringing was not a considerable cause of harm and probably appropriate, because it corresponded to the patriarchal order of society. But now that the cultural structure of society has changed, authoritarian upbringing no longer fits society in its present form, and so gives rise to a string of unfortunate after-effects that did not obtain previously. This is just to briefly mention one example. [98]

However, what we want to emphasize is that the laws of which we are speaking here hold for the relationships in which we live. They are laws that are found, not laws that are heard. Their demands are finite and well founded, and we must follow them if we want to fulfil the task posed by the relationships and the circumstances placed on us, and if we want to preserve the order of these relationships.

The situation is entirely different with the absolute or infinite demand. It does not lie in the order of things or relationships; the order of things and relationships only produces and determines the situation in which the individual hears the infinite demand. It is not objective but of a purely personal character, directed to the individual as a responsible person. Thanks to the fact that our concrete life is ordered in its natural and cultural shape, we are forced to live with one another, one bound to the other in predetermined natural and culturally conditioned relations. As parents we are bound to our children, as children we are bound to our parents, as authorities to the people, as people to the authorities, and so on, and so on. This bondage is only secondarily a common destiny; primarily it is a bondage together in responsibility. Thus as a result of its natural basis [90] and its cultural shape, each relationship, each order in its way forces one human being on another; and hence natural and cultural circumstances are the basis of the responsibility relationship, and in this relation of responsibility the absolute, ungrounded demand makes itself felt.

Just because a difference exists between the lawfulness that resides in relationships and the finite and well-founded demands on the one hand, and on the other hand the infinite demand that makes itself felt in responsibility, this does not mean that no relation exists between them. Service for the other, which the [99] responsible person has for the person to whom they are responsible, and which responsibility imposes on the individual, should proceed in words and works that are to the point, effective, and rational. The other should be served with sense and understanding; indeed therein lies the responsibility. But that now means that each ethical decision is directed both internally and externally. One has to make

the internal decision, in which the infinite and ungrounded demand is put to the individual, whether one either serves in obedience to the demand of responsibility for the other, or in disobedience against the demand, one considers oneself at the expense of the other and in spite of one's responsibility for them. The external decision raises the question for the individual of in which action or omission of an action, in which word or in which silence, should the internally directed decision be manifested in a decision.

In regard to this latter question—since the other should be served with insight and understanding, which work is effective and to the point—the lawfulness governing existing relationships plays a certain role. It is naturally of great significance for the externally directed decision. And it is no less valid after science is used on a grand scale to carry out an analysis of the relationships in their natural and cultural shape. The results reached by experts and researchers concern us all. For example, it concerns us what modern psychology and pedagogy have to say on the problem of upbringing. [91]

One could now ask: does the internal decision then play any kind of role? How can the law of responsibility in general be asserted in the midst of all this purely objective lawfulness, especially after this latter has been grounded scientifically to such a high degree? This can be done in a number of ways. [100]

Primarily it happens through personal judgement! As we touched on earlier, the laws that are present in the relationships as their foundation and cultural form do not demand the performance or omission of individual, determinate isolated actions; they demand personal judgement and at times allow even considerable room for such judgement. As a rule, there are no laws that can be followed blindly and stupidly. Inner decision has a very strong effect in personal judgement. Since objective law leaves room for personal judgement, space is left as it were for the influence of the inner decision {which the demand in the responsibility relations themselves puts the individual under}.

In addition, it is common knowledge that help can be given in ways which the recipient would like to reject. From this it is clear that the decision in its inward directedness, in which the individual is confronted with the infinite demand, must have an impact. Indeed, the decision is whether the individual who wills to do their duty performs the service in such a way as to keep it for themselves—contrary to the demand—or whether they—obeying the demand—make their service a gift to the other.^{vi} When service is kept for oneself as one's own achievement, it is very often perceived by the person for whom it is performed as so unpleasant that they prefer to do without it.

And finally, with responsibility and its demand, a determinate ranking relation is preserved. There is always a tension between the infinite demand of the

responsibility relation and the finite demand of the purely objective law. The lawfulness that is present in the naturally and culturally determined relationships will often get the upper hand in the name of objectivity and threaten to overrule the [92] law of responsibility. The tension that exists between the purely objective lawfulness and the law of responsibility can so easily be triggered that the [101] ranking relation is thereby shifted, so that in the longing for a purely scientific treatment of human beings, the purely objective laws are given precedence over the law of responsibility.

The tension must be maintained: the purely objective lawfulness must not be disregarded; but on the other hand the rank relation must be recognized, namely that the law of responsibility is the first criterion, the highest authority, that decides when, how, and to what degree the purely objective laws should rule. Only the law or demand of responsibility can assign a role to naturally and culturally given laws, namely to specify the external circumstances of the situation in which the absolute demand makes itself felt; that is, to serve those other human beings to whom life as something ordered binds the individual.

It ought to emerge from these considerations that there is the closest conceivable relation between concrete existence and the infinite demand. Primarily this means that logically speaking nothing prevents the infinite demand intervening in and having an effect on the concrete external existence of individuals.

But—following Kierkegaard—something essential must be added: this intervention and this effect can never be observed. The relation of the individual to the infinite demand is and remains invisible to all. The absolute, the ungrounded responsibility, never reveals itself directly as a cause of action, in such a way that the outsider could see and observe that the action has been performed in obedience to the absolute demand—not even if it is the agent themselves observing his own action. What the outsider sees and [102] can observe is the determinate, finite, and limited goal; what they can judge is the effectiveness of the action, and what they can come to know is its factual and rational basis. Whether the act is performed in [93] obedience to the radical demand remains hidden from the outsider; it is a matter between the individual and the demand and can therefore only be an object of conjecture or trust for others. One cannot see whether an action is undertaken in obedience to the infinite demand, or undertaken from egoistic motives. The action appears the same whether it is done from foolishness, from entrepreneurial spirit, or from obedience. The only thing that the agent themselves can declare, to which they can refer, is therefore the factual goal and basis of the action. And if a human being claims that they have acted in a certain way because they felt driven to do so by the infinite demand, that is then highly suspect.

Because the relation to the infinite demand is a matter between the individual and the infinite demand, or God, and cannot be given an equivalent expression in the external in such a way that an outsider could observe it, that means that for Kierkegaard it is a relation of 'inwardness'. It is often and justifiably asserted that by 'inwardness' Kierkegaard means not an affective or especially emotional state, but rather purely and simply in relationship to one's own existence, to relate oneself to God.

According to Kierkegaard, it seems to be the case that the thing to do is to so behave that the relation to the infinite demand, to God, can only keep its character as inwardness under the precondition of infinite abstraction from concrete and external existence, to undertake which must then be a special task. Against this, it must be said that it is the infinite demand, precisely as it makes itself felt in the concrete [103] and external existence of the individual, precisely as it shows itself in the bondage to the other person in responsibility, that makes the relation of the individual to this infinite demand into a relation of inwardness—to use Kierkegaard's expression—which is to say, into a relation that is invisible to the outsider.

Philosophy and Proclamation

[104/94] The infinite demand is not to be found in Heidegger {, notwithstanding Kierkegaard's obvious influence on him}. We need not say that he rejects it as such, but only that he views it as belonging not to philosophy but to proclamation, to say nothing of how he stood in relation to such a proclamation. And this brings us to a problem that is posed in a vivid way by Kierkegaard and the philosophy of existence and the relation between them {and I will go into this a little further at the end of this lecture and in the last one}.

Before we proceed to the constraints that both think must be placed on any proclamation, on any life- or world-view, it is necessary first to investigate more closely the difference between their conceptions of the relationship between philosophy and proclamation.

Are Kierkegaard's remarks concerning the synthesis between finitude and infinity, between temporality and eternity that belong to the self, philosophy or proclamation? The answer is clear: Kierkegaard intends them to be philosophy! They set out an analysis of human existence and the results of such an analysis. Here we must distinguish between Kierkegaard and Heidegger if we want to draw the boundary between philosophy and proclamation. For Kierkegaard, ethics belongs with the analysis of existence; the infinite demand belongs with the structure of human existence, indeed it is the decisive element therein. Kierkegaard analyses existence, [105] because in it the existing being stands under the demand; indeed it is what existing consists in. It is obvious that the results of such an analysis cannot be neutral, which is why Kierkegaard also requires the dialectic of communication. According to Kierkegaard's understanding of existence, an analysis of existence cannot be given in an ethically neutral manner.

On the other hand, Heidegger's [95] analysis of existence should not be described as neutral, as many interpreters have done. A frequent objection to Heidegger is that he did not stick to his own intention, but departed from it. The objection is as follows: if an individual can only attain their own existence by being a self, which in turn depends on whether they exist either in authenticity or inauthenticity—as Heidegger's analysis of existence states—then this analysis

cannot be ethically neutral. It has been further objected that Heidegger is a supporter of an heroic life-view, whose point is that the individual in anxiety heroically looks their situation in the eye: that he is abandoned to himself in care and death and, all alone, must rely on himself to live this life as an individual responsible for himself.

However, this objection can be answered by looking at an introduction to Heidegger's philosophy, where it is explained that it never was Heidegger's intention that his analysis of existence should be ethically neutral. 'On the contrary, the analysis as phenomenology is an ethics from the beginning—and rightly so; because it brings out the possibility of decision in the definition of existence... Human existence is nothing but to be in the decision situation.' But things are different with the content of the decision that is left up to the individual themselves; that is to say, the content of the decision that is determined from the content of the demand is not the business of philosophy, but rather of proclamation. 'Ontology only describes its condition of possibility' (Börge [106] Diderichsen, 'To Be: An Introduction to Martin Heidegger's Philosophy', *Tidhverv*, 22 (1948), pp. 62–72, p. 72).

The demand, which for Heidegger must have a wholly determinate content, lies outside the realm of philosophy. Philosophy only has the task of showing the preconditions in the structure of human [96] existence that make it possible to hear something as a demand and to accept it. To put it more determinately: in order for the ethical demand to be able to concern my own existence, it must so to speak already be a matter of concern prior to the ethical demand, by virtue of the purely formal structure of my existence as care and death; it would otherwise be wholly incomprehensible how the ethical demand could concern existence. If a human being does not already relate themselves to themselves in their own possibilities prior to the ethical demand, a human being could not relate themselves to these in the ethical demand, and then there would be no ethical demand at all.

As regards Kierkegaard, he did not have the opportunity to take a stance on this problem. As Heidegger notes in one place,¹ Kierkegaard did not know of the analysis of existence in the way that he—Heidegger—understood it and set it out. But if we nonetheless wanted to characterize Kierkegaard's thinking from the vantage point of Heidegger's problem, there is here a decisive difference of views. For Kierkegaard, my own existence does not turn on the fact that I need to relate myself to my own possibilities before the ethical demand can be made comprehensible at all. That would only be the case if the ethical demand were to come from outside the person and thus had a wholly determinate content. But according to Kierkegaard, the ethical demand comes from inside; it belongs to human

existence. From the beginning he puts decisive weight on this; it is stressed several times in his presentation of the ethical stage in the second part of *Either/Or*. [107] The infinitude of the demand itself takes part in the doubling of the spiritual relations. It is completely clear that Kierkegaard gives a philosophical analysis in his remarks on the infinite demand. That is why the infinite demand, which constitutes existence itself and its becoming, and that therefore belongs with the purely formal structure of existence, is also contentless; what it aims for, as already mentioned, is derived solely from its bare [97] infinitude. Therefore this is indeed also the precondition for the fact that it can belong to philosophy and not to proclamation. If it had a content, it would have to come from outside.

In short, while for Heidegger the ethical, the infinite demand, belongs to the proclamation because the demand must have a content, for Kierkegaard it belongs to philosophy. Even if not the decisive or major one, this is one reason why for Kierkegaard, the infinite demand is empty.

Heidegger constantly stresses that his investigations are only an analysis of the purely formal structure of human existence, and nothing to do with ethics, theology, or any life- or world-view. His whole philosophy is not set out as a philosophy of existence, like that of Karl Jaspers for example, but as an ontology. However, at the same time, Heidegger claims that each ethic, theology, life- or world-view must presuppose this analysis and its results in order to be comprehensible at all.

Until now, proclamation has been understood as discourse concerning human existence whose content is determined—whether the content is determined through life-view or in a more narrow sense by proclamation—without considering whether this content is more ethical, political, or religious. The opposition between proclamation and philosophy has thus only been fixed as an opposition between content-full [108] and formal/empty discourse concerning human existence. This is so not only for Heidegger but also for Kierkegaard: for, according to Kierkegaard this is the case when ethics, religiously understood, goes into philosophical discussions of what existence is (as already mentioned), because the ethical-religious belongs with the purely formal structure of existence—in contrast to Christianity, which is a content-determined discourse.

The difference between proclamation—the Word in the broadest sense—and philosophy consists also in the fact that the proclamation is not the result of an analysis; it cannot be demonstrated; from the standpoint of philosophy, proclamation seems to be nothing but assertions.

But that does not mean that the content of the proclamation is [98] incomprehensible. Yet how is it explicable that the proclamation, the content of which is not the result of an analysis, and which cannot be demonstrated, is nonetheless

comprehensible? The explanation must lie in the fact that the content of proclamation corresponds to the purely formal structure of human existence, that it lets itself be understood in the formal/empty determinations that result from the analysis of the structure of human existence. If that is not the case, if the proclamation is not comprehensible in the sense that the inner structure of existence is graspable, then the receiving or accepting of a proclamation would either involve allowing others to impose it upon one or imposing it on oneself. Faith without understanding is not faith, but coercion; the individual then imposes the proclamation on themselves not because they take it up {and accept it} for the sake of its content, but for other and therefore illegitimate motives. If a proclamation is not comprehensible in the sense that it corresponds to the structure of human existence, what would the difference then be between proclamation and obscure superstition? Philosophy as the analysis of existence [109] can therefore serve to distinguish between faith and coercion.

A characteristic example of the proclamation needing to be comprehensible in the sense we have mentioned, an example that highlights the same issue, is Kierkegaard's characterization of the truth of Christianity as a paradox and an absurdity. For Kierkegaard aims to show the comprehensibility of this truth—in the way that its paradoxicality and absurdity correspond to the structure of human existence: as essential truth, the truth of Christianity is the truth concerning existence. It therefore cannot be objective and certain. If it were objective, it would make the existence, of which it is the truth, wholly indifferent. And if it were certain, it would be settled for all time; but it is impossible for the truth of existence to be settled, because existence is becoming and movement. The truth of existence must be a truth that precisely leaves existence in its becoming, that [99] intensifies its passion and inwardness; it must therefore be uncertain, an act of daring, a risk, that constantly requires the staking of existence, so that existence is truly becoming. But what is more uncertain, what is more risky, what can more 'intensify the infinite passion of inwardness' [*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, SKS 7: 186/KW 12.1: 203] than the paradox and absurdity of truth. {It is thus to be understood that truth and existence have this character.}

{Kierkegaard does not hide this. On the contrary, it is to be understood that} The truth of Christianity must go against understanding. For understanding and existence precisely contradict one another. Understanding threatens—objectively—to make existence indifferent. The truth of existence must therefore fight against understanding, just as existence must fight against it, which is why the paradox 'must be'. The necessity of the paradox can therefore be explained. {And this explanation is precisely the difference between the simple and the wise; the latter comprehend that it cannot be different, that is, that the truth must be

paradox. Therefore Kierkegaard can say that Christianity ‘fits the bill’.) The paradox corresponds to existence in passion. ‘Subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is the paradox, paradox and passion are completely in accord, and the paradox is perfectly suited to one situated at the extremity of existence’ [SKS 7: 210/KW 12.1: 230]. [110]

This is cited only as an illustration—but an illustration that takes things to a crucial point. It is not the case, as in earlier times, that philosophy makes its demand of proclamation in the name of ‘reason’: that is, to be in agreement with reason or at least not fight it. Rather, philosophy here makes its demand of proclamation in the name of existence, that its statements must correspond to the structure of human existence.

That the proclamation should correspond to the determinations of the analysis of existence obviously does not mean that one first settles the results of a formal and empty analysis of existence, that one then wholly mechanically sets up as a touchstone [100] for any proclamation, and insists that it be conceived inside the space of this given philosophy. Historically and factually it is precisely the other way round. The proclamation comes first; through this the human being first gets on the scent of aspects of their purely formal structure, of which they were not conscious before the proclamation and perhaps of which they would never have become conscious without it. So for example, Heidegger’s analysis of existence, as formal and empty as its determinations may be, is inspired by Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard and their accounts of Christian proclamation.

It follows from the account of the relation between philosophy and the proclamation given here, that the analysis of existence is a touchstone for each proclamation and imposes quite specific constraints on it. {I will go into this further in the last lecture.}

Let us make a closer inspection of this test to which every ethics, theology, life-view, and proclamation must be subjected.

The test can be formulated in a series of questions, which are really an expression of the same concern [111] from different perspectives. One question is: does the proclamation—to put it briefly—leave the individual at the mercy of the crowd, or does it insist that the person who receives it lives their life as an individual?

And further: does the proclamation seduce the human being into committing themselves to what has been realized, or does its content insist that the addressee remain true to the character of their own existence as becoming and possibility?

The two questions are closely bound up with one another. The proclamation that tempts the human being to commit themselves to what has been realized at the same time places them at the mercy of the crowd.

Now both Kierkegaard and Heidegger claim that a human being can remain true to the character of their existence as becoming and possibility [101] only through the relation to the absolute and radical; for the absolute and radical either lies beyond any realization as the infinite demand, or it has in general no relation to realization, as in the case of death.

Two things follow from this: firstly, that the relation of the individual to the absolute and radical is hidden, invisible for all, and can never be observed by the third party. In the contrasting case, it is not solely a relation between the absolute, the radical, and the individual; it is then not a relation that really makes the individual into an individual. In everything that is visible and observable, the third party has some say; what is visible and observable is indeed something intersubjective, which it is the task of the third party to monitor. Therefore one question that the existence analysis poses for the proclamation is whether it—the proclamation—lets the relation of the individual to the absolute be hidden from the outsider, from the third.

That the human being is isolated through the relation to the radical and absolute in order to remain true to the character of their existence as becoming and possibility, [112] means secondly that the action that the individual carries out, prompted by their relation to the radical and absolute, can never have the character of an immediate realization of the radical and absolute, and thus can therefore never give them the complete certainty of having acted rightly and correctly. There is and remains and should be a break, an hiatus, between the relation of the individual to the absolute and the action to which this relation gives rise. This does not mean that the relation to the absolute and radical has nothing to do with concrete and external existence, so that the latter is completely untouched by the former. Indeed, the relation to the absolute and radical ought not to be a life of hermetically sealed inwardness, with an independent existence alongside the life of concrete and external existence. That would be mysticism. No, the sense of the relation to the absolute and radical is that it impacts on concrete, external [102] existence. However, this ‘impact’ never has the character of a realization of the absolute and radical; the demand is absolute because it can never be realized immediately and once and for all, and death is radical because its possibility has no relation to any realization. We can ‘only’ speak of actions that are occasioned by the relation to the absolute and radical, and that look exactly the same as the actions that are occasioned in completely different ways. Just as the relation to the absolute and radical is itself hidden, so it is also hidden whether an action is occasioned by these relations.

The individual therefore never has a complete certainty that they have acted rightly and correctly. Precisely because the action only comes about through the

relation to the absolute and radical, so that there is a break, an hiatus between this relation and the action, the individual must themselves then use their incomplete understanding, their limited [113] insight, their distorted humanity, and their egoistical love, in order to make clear what in the individual case is to be said or not said, done or not done. This means that the responsibility is {and remains} that of the individual, and thus that they can only live and act in conditions of uncertainty for which they are responsible.

If one could speak about an immediate realization of the absolute and radical, then things would be wholly different; one could then speak and act, not speak and not act—which, however, would be equivalent to an absolute certainty that would have the same significance as an absolute irresponsibility. It would not be the understanding, insight, and love of the individual but that of the absolute, and so also responsibility would shift from the individual human being to the absolute. The individual themselves would be eliminated; they would just be the one who must carry out, realize, and apply what is already given—without personal commitment, consideration, and decision.

Therefore a question which the existence analysis poses to the proclamation is whether it gives human beings an absolute certainty in their life and actions, or whether it makes clear to the individual that they must [103] live their life in uncertainty, in their own responsibility, and in their own guilt.

Now what would it mean to be under the illusion that the absolute can be immediately realized, directly applied? What would it mean for insight not to belong to the self in complete uncertainty, but rather to the absolute in complete certainty? The answer is: as directly applicable, as immediately realizable, the absolute and radical would become transformed and garbled into an idea, a principle, and a value; in other words, it would then be something thought, the product of reason or of thought. And as thought it would be a system, an ideology or a utopia.

Put briefly, existence would be subordinate to thought. That which is directly applicable and immediately realizable is [114] always something thought and thought out. And further: if what is to be said and done were concerned with a direct application or immediate realization of something thought and thought out, existence would be left out of play; hence it would not depend on insight, humanity, personal commitment, and the decision of the existing person. That would mean that, if it were possible to directly apply and immediately realize the absolute and radical, then thought would override existence.

In order to prevent an eventual misunderstanding or a false conclusion, we can add that no existence is more thoughtless than the one in which thought has precedence over existence; for the absolute certainty that follows from this, if that

which is thought out once and for all is just to be applied and realized, indeed makes any further thinking superfluous. Everything can proceed wholly mechanically; only a purely technical calculation is necessary. In any case, there is no talk of real foundational thinking, such as uncertainty and doubt bring into play.

The absolute and radical is, however, as absolute and radical, beyond every immediate realization and direct application; as absolute and radical it cannot be a product, and so not a product of thinking; it must (as it were) be given before thought, [104] with human existence—and cannot be a freely thought-out idea, ideology, utopia, or freely thought-out principle. This gives rise to the break, the {previously mentioned} hiatus between the relation to the radical and absolute, and the action, which it prompts. Here in this hiatus the individual must, from their own responsibility—in the external directedness of the decision—deploy their understanding, their insight, and their humanity and make clear to themselves what they ought to do. Here therefore thought is subordinate to existence.

This does not mean that existence is without thought—anything but. There is nothing that so strongly demands foundational thinking [115] as the subordination of thinking to existence. The uncertainty, which is inevitable where there is thinking for the sake of existence, puts thinking continually in motion. The understanding of existence as a becoming, as a permanent possibility, and the connected understanding that the situation is always new and requires new decisions, keeps thinking alive.

And another thing! The subordination of existence to thinking, which one might see as entirely harmless, contains on the contrary a seed of contempt for the other human being. If one's own existence is disregarded, insofar as one is only there in order to realize what has already been thought out and thought out once and for all, then clearly the existence of the other person is disregarded. For then naturally it is not only one's own existence but also that of the other that is subordinate to what is thought and thought out.

On the other hand, where the absolute is the infinite demand in the responsibility relation itself, it is indeed clear that thinking is subordinate to the existence of the other; thinking ought indeed to shed light on what best serves the other. But also where the absolute is death, thinking is subordinated to the existence of the other human being, inasmuch as the individual's life together with the others is characterized by the fact that the others also have the task, each for themselves, to live [105] their life from the perspective of death as the outermost possibility of life as an individual person.

Therefore the analysis of existence poses a further question to proclamation: in proclamation, is the existence of oneself and the other there for the sake of thinking, or is thinking there for the existence of oneself and the other?

To now summarize the questions in which the critical test is crystalized, to which {philosophy understood as an analysis of existence subjects} every ethic, theology, life-view and proclamation are subjected, it needs to be asked: does the proclamation—always proclamation in the [116] broadest sense—deliver up the individual to the crowd? Does it tempt them to be content with what is already realized and what must be realized? Does it let them float along in the illusion that the absolute can be immediately realized in an absolutely definite action, where one can see that it has been performed in obedience to the absolute because the absolute is a thought-out ideology or utopia, that subordinates oneself and the existence of other human beings to thinking?

Or: does the proclamation require that the individual ought to live their life as an individual true to the character of their existence as becoming and possibility, knowing full well that what they say and do through their relation to the absolute is said and done in accordance with their own responsibility and in complete uncertainty, because the individual's thinking is there for the sake of their own existence and that of the other human being?

Now is a good point to illustrate what has been said thus far and to investigate whether a particular proclamation passes the above test. However, we can only hint at this; and the most obvious example in this connection is the Christian message, which is known in the form of the proclamation of the Church.

Only to a superficial observer would such a critical-philosophical investigation {or test} of the Christian proclamation, ethic, and theology amount to imposing an alien yardstick upon it. Seen purely historically, [106] it is in fact the case, as has already been discussed, that it is only with the help of Christian philosophy that philosophy, in the shape of an analysis of existence, has become aware of the crucial elements in the structure of human existence at all. Therefore, viewed correctly, it is in fact with the Christian message that the proclamation of the Church is tested and criticized, even if this comes about in the form of a philosophical-critical examination {of the Church's proclamation}, and even if it [117] comes about with purely formal determinations. This goes without saying if philosophy, in its presentation of the purely formal structure of existence, is {already} inspired by Christianity.

Incidentally, it is just such a purely philosophical-critical test that Kierkegaard in places directs against the Church's proclamation of his time, when for example he reproaches it for delivering up the individual to the crowd. He complains that it is sufficient for someone to be Christian that they are born in a geographically Christian area; there is nothing disturbing in being Christian; for that is what one generally is anyway, as are all the others. {Or} Kierkegaard also subjects the

proclamation of the Church to a purely philosophical examination, charging that ministers keep using aesthetic categories in their Christian lectures. He demands that the aesthetic and ethical-religious categories be distinguished.

This of course does not mean that the theologian should uncritically accept philosophy in the form of an existence analysis as authoritative. It is rather a question of the debate getting under way and not being broken up by prejudices from the start. Ultimately it is the same human existence, whether it is centred on philosophy or theology. The concern that they share ought to allow fruitful interaction to seem wholly natural.

Indeed it is of decisive importance—and in the debate between philosophy and theology this needs to be attended to—that the objections that theology has directed against this or that philosophy, are of a philosophical kind. If theology does not want to acknowledge the test of the proclamation through a given philosophy, then the reason can only be that philosophy has not done its own philosophical work thoroughly [107] and well enough. This is perhaps because philosophy has been unwilling to have its attention drawn to the elements in the structure of human [118] existence by the Christian proclamation, even though it is only through this proclamation that these elements can be discovered or explained. On the other hand, if theology rejects *a priori* a philosophical critique of the proclamation of the Church, on the grounds that such a proclamation is based on a revelation, then theology assumes that revelation as such does not need to correspond to the structure of human existence. But in that case, through this assumption, such a theology counts on the Christian message demanding a sacrifice of existence, just as it was asserted earlier that it demands a sacrifice of the intellect. The sacrifice of existence consists in revelation being, it is claimed, not only rationally but also existentially incomprehensible, whereby the difference between faith and coercion is annulled. (It goes without saying that the sacrifice of existence has no connection to suffering.) {Revelation, one believes, is as such not rational, but existentially incomprehensible.}

There are only two possibilities: either there is a difference between faith and coercion, because there is understanding in faith, because the Christian message corresponds to the formal structure of human existence. In this case the proclamation of the Church is delivered up to philosophical critique and it must, if it is said to be unjustified, oppose this on a philosophical level.

Or, however, there is no difference between faith and coercion, because the Christian message, being based on revelation, does not correspond to the structure of human existence. The message cannot be understood, and faith which is without understanding cannot be distinguished from coercion. It would then indeed follow that theology *a priori* rejects every philosophical-critical

investigation of the proclamation of the Church. For if this is the case, certainly theology would have annulled itself in the annulment of the difference between faith and superstition.

Now to come to the matter at hand. Every [119] political use of Christianity, for example, is open to critique by philosophical existence analysis, where Christianity is used as the reason or argument for a particular policy. That does not [108] of course mean that the human being for whom the Christian message is the decisive truth of their existence must take up a position that is elevated above the political struggle and political parties. Not at all; but it means that the person concerned cannot derive from the Christian message any special Christian argument for one policy or another, and rather must argue for their politico-economic views exactly like everyone else—and indeed with arguments that could be recognized by the non-Christian as well as by the Christian. They must use their own reason, insight, and humanity in order to arrive at clarity regarding politico-economic problems for themselves; just as the reason, understanding, and humanity of other people must be appealed to in their political reflections, without regard to whether they are Christian or non-Christian. Put briefly, every mixing of Christianity and policy, each assertion that a specifically Christian policy ought to be put forward, is open to the critique of philosophical existence analysis.

That is not all. The assertion that there should be a special Christian ethics cannot stand up to this {aforementioned} investigation. Just as little as Christianity provides the Christian with a 'superior' political knowledge, does it equip them with 'superior' ethical knowledge. Everything which puts them in the position to make a decision of an ethical kind, they must come to in the same way as anybody else, and they must motivate their position in such a way that their motives can be accepted by the non-Christian just as much as the Christian.

Then what has philosophical analysis of existence to object to in the assertion that there is a special Christian politics and a special Christian ethics? First, that the person who makes this assertion turns their relation to the [120] absolute and radical into an obvious fact, which they so to speak invite outsiders to inspect and monitor. And that is a major misunderstanding on their part. For what is the significance of the relation of the individual to the radical demand of the Christian message? In what way does it have [109] an influence on the concrete existence of the individual, if for example this consists in taking a position on one thing or another in politics and ethics? The answer is that the command contained in the Christian message states that the individual in their deliberations should not let their own personal interests be decisive, but that instead that which serves the other person. And precisely for this reason, the Christian

message cannot be used as an argument. If a human being were to argue for a political or ethical position on the basis that they came to it because they had not thought about their interests but rather the interests of the neighbour, they would make themselves guilty of an enormous phariseism and a presumptuous lack of objectivity. Which would be unavoidable precisely because they want to make obvious what should be hidden. Their relation to the radical demand, under which the Christian message has placed them, is and remains a merely private matter. They can only base their political and ethical statements on a political and ethical conception of human and social life, concerning which they must assume that Christians and non-Christians can be in agreement.

Against this critique, that the use of Christianity as the grounds and argument for political and ethical decisions is highly unobjective, it could be claimed that exactly the opposite holds. The critique—one might say—wholly distorts the relations that it criticizes. One could say that the situation here is not that one argues from one's own highly personal relationship to the Christian message, but from the message as such. It would then be perceived as objective that one [121] appeals to the Christian message as such, without consideration of one's own faith or lack of faith.

But here we come to the second objection that philosophical existence analysis makes to the claim that there is a special Christian politics or ethics, namely, that in this claim Christianity is made into an ideology that is at one's disposal, and can be directly applied and immediately realized. If, without any [110] consideration of one's relation to the Christian message, one thinks one can refer to it as something given, one has thereby transformed it into directly applicable principles and ideas. Insofar as one sets aside one's own relation to the Christian message in order to operate with it as with something given, it is ossified into an ideology that can be applied.

And the next objection follows: in asserting, theoretically or practically, the direct applicability of the Christian message, one succumbs to the illusion that the human being—if only they orientate themselves by the Christian message—is in the position to be able to speak and act with absolute certainty {, and to take up viewpoints with divine certainty}. To be Christian would then consist in being able to transcend one's human limitation. It would lead to the Christian message causing some people to cut themselves off, in their political and ethical reflections, from the non-Christian.

The possibility of being able to speak and act with absolute certainty is an expression of the ossification of Christianity into an applicable ideology, through which the individual's own existence also ossifies. We can no longer speak of uncertainty, of being true to the character of existence as becoming and

possibility in each new decision. One has already determined once and for all what is to be realized, namely the Christian ideology, so that the role of the individual is only the carrying out, the realizing of what is already given. The confession that [122] the individual owes their neighbour becomes proselytizing instead, and is organized into pushing forward a front-line special to the Church.ⁱⁱ The service that the individual owes to their neighbour is collectivized as a special activity of the Church that reduces the service to a means for the mission.

The ossification of Christianity into an ideology and the simultaneous ossification of existence into an immediate realization and dissemination of this ideology, manifests itself in the way that the Church establishes itself as a special front-line in the people, and gives itself the task of organizing and collectivizing confession and service, in order to make it forceful and effective. One fears that it is not forceful or effective when [111] it is only a matter of the confession and service of the Christian as an individual person, which they owe their neighbour, in all uncertainty in their life in the people.

In all this, existence is subordinate to thinking, which means that thinking becomes a pretty paltry affair; for what has been thought, and to which existence is subordinate, is thought out once and for all. It expresses itself in a remarkable simplification of problems. For example, the claim is made by the movement that calls itself 'moral re-armament', that the world would be much improved, if only one, or even better everyone, were to think in their lives and actions not just of themselves but of the good of others; but this is tantamount to sweeping all careful thinking aside. To make the radical demand, which the individual can only hear in a form of guilt that isolates them from all others, and whose directives are therefore hidden and remain hidden from all others—to make this an external, handy principle that can be used as a magic formula to solve all problems, so that all that remains to thinking is to work on technical questions, would mean indeed that the radical demand becomes only a phrase, taken for granted, however well meant.

The absolute, the radical is misplaced as soon as the absolute, the radical is not given elementally, [123] primitively, with human existence itself—the demand that is given with existence as an existence in responsibility or as existence towards death—but as something thought or thought out. The absolute, the radical is transformed into some thing or some goal that one imagines and makes an object of one's striving and for which one can work. The absolute is no longer the demand itself, but rather an ideology or utopia. {The absolute is no longer the demand to me in responsibility, but rather what I can achieve and realize through my responsibility.} The absolute is no longer that I have responsibility, but rather that what I am responsible for is realized, no matter whether

this concerns the victory or triumph of a determinate ideology or of a determinate social order.

In this way, not only one's own existence, but also that of the other human being, is subordinated to [112] that which is thought and thought out. For to make the thing and the goal the absolute, where this absolute is now a determinate ideology or social order, is to elevate it over the human, and must naturally lead to coercion. The thing as absolute must then be more important than fellow human beings. And one ought not to forget that in all this coercion, one's conscience could be perfectly clean; it is after all the absolute, for which one bears responsibility, that is realized. Church history has plenty of examples of violent physical coercion that was used in the name of Christianity. Today that is no longer possible. But it is still coercion when the Christian message is not accepted for its own sake, but as a finite thing, a relative goal, if also the thing and the goal may indeed be so important and worthwhile, as the existence of a people or the world, or the maintenance of the moral or the social order. {I will not develop this further. But as a theologian, I just want to say that it seems to me that philosophy, understood as the existence analysis, in an urgent and fruitful way tests the proclamation—and also and above all the problem of the proclamation of the Church.

I could have taken another example, namely the communist proclamation, which clearly moves from the absolute, to the subordination of existence under the one way of thinking for all, and with this results in coercion. However, I will confine myself to these hints.}

In another connection, we noted that the responsible person is surely responsible for the good of the other, where, because responsibility does not mean to be made the means of the other, they have to decide on the basis of their own insight [124] what the good of the other consists in. Being in a responsibility relation means to form a view over what best serves the other, where one may very well contradict the wishes of the other. Here one can now raise the objection that it is then a presumption, an encroachment on the rights of the other, to take on responsibility for them.

The objection is justified, if the responsible person does not make [113] clear to themselves that the responsibility has wholly determinate limits; it can never consist in taking on the responsibility *of* the other. This limit would be drawn as much by Kierkegaard as by Heidegger; by Kierkegaard in the demand of the dialectic of communication, and by Heidegger in the claim that it belongs to life in its authenticity that words and deeds in life with one another are determined by this: that also the others—each from themselves—have the task to live their lives as individual persons.

The limit of this responsibility is then immediately exceeded if the absolute undergoes a transition from the invisible relation of responsibility to the demand, into a visible goal and a visible cause. Responsibility for the other gives way before the absolute in a goal or a cause. If the limits of responsibility are to be respected, the responsible person must be clear about where they lie; though the responsibility itself is absolute, unconditioned, and ungrounded, nevertheless the words and actions which it causes must be relative and finite and (as far as possible) well founded. For only relative, finite, and well-grounded words and actions leave room for the responsibility of the other. The absolute of responsibility never consists in making the goal of those actions to which responsibility gives rise into an absolute; the absolute can only [125] consist in the fact that the action with its relative goal goes against the individual, most personal interests of the one who bears the responsibility.

Incidentally, connected with this is a line of thought, associated with ethical idealism, about respecting the independence and self-sufficiency of other people. It consists in a tension on the one side, between the insight into what is best for the other, which the responsible person has in virtue of their understanding of life, and on the other side respect for the spiritual self-sufficiency and independence of the other. The function of ethical idealism is to prevent it becoming the case that the responsibility leads to encroachment, in order thus to bring about a resolution of the tension.

Ethical idealism was therefore not mistaken to speak of respect for mutual independence, but it was incorrect that such respect is all there is to ethics. [114] Ethical idealism removed respect from this relation of tension. Because it made respect the whole content, it made responsibility a wholly inner-directed relation: the individual was only responsible for themselves. The ethical consisted in the development of personal virtues and in respecting the corresponding self-development of the other. Respect for the independence of the other became a pretext to legitimate one's own self-development.

Thinking and Existence

[126/115] The relation between the analysis of existence and the proclamation raises the problem of the relation between thinking and existence, on which we have already made a start {and which for a large part of Kierkegaard's writings is his real concern}. In conclusion, then, this problematic issue, as it is present in Kierkegaard, ought to be sketched briefly.

There is no difficulty in getting clear about what this problem is: knowledge and existence are incommensurable. To think is to abstract from existence and the infinite interest of the individual in existence.

Kierkegaard formulates the problem in different ways. First: what is thought is universal. As he says in *The Concept of Anxiety*: 'Only what is universal *is* in the way that it is thought and can be thought . . . and thus is as it can be thought' [SKS 4: 381 note/KW 8: 78 note]. {What concerns the universal is the unity of thought and being.} Kierkegaard proceeds from the theory of knowledge of transcendental idealism, but limits it. The thesis that thinking and being are one is correct, he says, so long as it is emphasized that the being that is thought is the universal. By contrast, the thesis is wrong, if what is meant by 'the being that *is* in the way that it can be thought' is an existent being; for the existent being is the individual, whose existence therefore cannot be thought [SKS 7: 298/KW 12.1: 327]. {Kierkegaard comes back to this again and again. In *The Sickness unto Death* he says: "The individual human being precisely lies under the concept; one cannot think of an individual human being, but only of the concept "human being"" [SKS 11: 230/KW 19: 119]. In *The Concept of Anxiety* he explains that precisely in speaking [116] of their 'self' as a 'self', the individual (as it were) protests against the claim that the individual supposedly is the same as the universal. 'But "self" precisely means this contradiction, that the universal is posited as the individual' [SKS 4: 381/KW 8: 78].}

Second, the problem is formulated in the following way: in disinterestedness, thinking abstracts from the existence of the thinker themselves. By contrast, the individual is infinitely interested in their own existence [SKS 7: 286/KW 12.1: 313–14]. [127]

Third: what is thought is as such timeless, so that becoming therefore cannot be thought. By contrast, the existing exists in time in becoming [SKS 7: 281/KW 12.1: 308–9].

It is characteristic that Kierkegaard does not conclude from this that the existing individual must turn away from attempting to think existence; on the contrary, he maintains that the thinker is the existent [SKS 7: 281/KW 12.1: 308]. He does not see himself as forced to separate existence and thinking because they are incompatible, but rather resolutely rejects the conclusion ‘that an existing being that really exists does not think at all’ [SKS 7: 289/KW 12.1: 317].

A conclusion of this sort presupposes a wholly false conception of the relation between thinking and existence. It allows itself to think about the ethical—as with everything else—only abstractly, generally, and timelessly, despite the fact that the ethical is always concrete, individual, and in the moment. If we conclude from this that thinking has nothing to do with the ethical, with existence, this conclusion implies that [117] we only use knowledge to leave existence outside. That means that we assume that knowledge is nothing if it is not everything.

That is just what Kierkegaard turns against, the attempt to make knowledge everything. It is the deification of pure thought, the claim that it is the highest, which Kierkegaard makes the object of his satire in the whole *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. With this claim, the thinker makes their own existence something entirely without interest. In this way, abstraction gives rise to a thinking that is pure in the sense that it is without a relation to the existing individual.

However, on the other side, we must make clear that thinking is {and remains} abstract, universal, and timeless. Indeed, thinking is not made concrete through thinking about the concrete, but still remains abstract. It does not become individual and [128] in the moment through the fact that individual existence in the moment is thought, but rather remains universal and timeless. If we insist that thinking, in order to think existence, must rid itself of its abstract, universal, and timeless essence, and take up concrete, individualized, and momentary existence, then we basically insist that it ought to annul existence; thus our only interest in thinking is to escape from existence in thinking.

A further issue is that it is a consequence of the character of thinking as abstract, universal, and timeless, that it is not fitting for it to put itself into relation to existence—that is something that only the existing as existing can do. The abstract, universal, and timeless can only be understood in a concrete, individual, and momentary way through existence, through the thinker thinking at the same time that they are an existing individual.

Kierkegaard therefore does not solve the problem of the relation between thinking and existence, but propounds in various forms that (to put it in his

words) 'existence is the most difficult thing for a thinker, when they must remain in it' [SKS 7: 321/KW 12.1: 351]. That the problem cannot be solved is not [118] Kierkegaard's shortcoming; it is and ought to remain insoluble.

Only then is thinking subordinate to existence; and only this subordination is in a position to keep thinking going, and to keep it living as something fundamental, that is, as a philosophical thinking.

Editor's Notes

Chapter 1

- i. The German version is misleading here, as it has 'ablocken' which means to 'tease out' or 'draw out', whereas Kierkegaard's text has 'franarre' which means to 'trick' or 'defraud'. We have therefore followed the Danish version.
- ii. The German has 'wie' but Kierkegaard's text has 'hvad' which means 'what' not 'how'.
- iii. The German has 'Bekümmerung', but 'Bekümmernis' would be the usual term; 'Bekümmerung' may have been chosen to remind the reader of the Danish word 'bekymring', which means 'worry' or 'concern'.
- iv. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §27.
- v. The Danish text is continuous here.

Chapter 2

- i. Rudolf Bultmann, 'What Does It Mean to Speak of God?', in his *Faith and Understanding I*, translated by Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM Press, 1969), pp. 53–65.
- ii. Løgstrup gives no reference for his quotation here, which would seem in fact to be a rough paraphrase of the text in *Concept of Anxiety*, SKS 4: 347/KW 8: 41.
- iii. Words in brackets added by Løgstrup.

Chapter 3

- i. There is a pun here which goes missing in English between 'their own [*eigene*] existence' and existence 'in an inauthentic sense [*uneigentlich*]'.
- ii. The German text is misleading here as it has 'their' (*ihr*) instead of 'its'.
- iii. It is not entirely clear what part of the text Løgstrup is referring to here, as the last chapter deals with a different issue concerning the relation between thought and existence, while the issue of the nature of decisions comes up at various points after this discussion.
- iv. There is a word play here that is lost in English between the German word for 'immediacy' (*Unmittelbarkeit*) and for 'unreflective' (*Unmittelbare*).

Chapter 4

- i. Cf. J. G. Fichte, *Outline of the Distinctive Character of the Wissenschaftslehre*, in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 288.
- ii. In both German and Danish, there is a close etymological link between 'living in fantasy' and 'imagination', which are respectively 'lebt phantastisch' and 'Phantasie', and 'leve fantastisk' and 'fantasi'.

- iii. Løgstrup here plays on the way in which the German for infinite can also mean endless, while the German for finite can also mean what has an end; and the same word play also works in Danish.
- iv. The Danish version differs here: 'And it has to have that logical character, as this is not just a consequence of what the immediate demand demands of the human being, namely that they become nothing in disobedience of it, but that the demand involves becoming nothing in a purely abstract way'. The forthright tone of the Danish suggests that there could be a mistake in the German version, in which Løgstrup uses the more tentative 'may be' rather than 'is' at the start of this sentence. This also forms a separate paragraph in the Danish text.
- v. The Danish text uses the name of the pseudonym's author of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* here, Johannes Climacus.

Chapter 6

- i. The Danish text differs here: 'but rather to understand it in this this way: that it is untenable to make clear what the infinite demand consists in, while abstracting—infinity—from concrete existence'.
- ii. Here and in the next three paragraphs, and intermittently in what follows, the Danish version uses the term 'krav' rather than 'fording', whereas the German text continues to use 'Forderung'. While 'krav' can be translated as 'demand', it can also be translated as 'requirement' or 'claim', and Løgstrup usually uses it (as here) when speaking about social requirements on us, in contrast to the ethical demand which is prior to such social norms.
- iii. The Danish version has a paragraph break here.
- iv. There is a word play here on 'Dasein' in German that goes missing in English: 'sie sind auf eine andere Weise, als der Mensch da ist'.
- v. This 'all' has been added, as in what follows Løgstrup seems to divide the finite demands into two categories: those that require no real involvement by the individual and so can be followed blindly, and those which involve more concrete social relations (akin to Luther's social orders, such as parent and child, husband and wife), where at least some engagement by the individual is required. The latter point is developed further in *The Ethical Demand*, §3.3.
- vi. The Danish version differs slightly, and is rather clearer: 'For the decision consists in whether the individual wants to do their duty while being disobedient to the demand, wants to keep the service they provide for themselves—or whether they, in obedience to the demand, also want to give the service to the other person.'

Chapter 7

- i. This is a reference to *Being and Time*, Division II, §45 fn. 6: 'In the nineteenth century Søren Kierkegaard explicitly grasped and thought through the problem of existence as an existential problem in a penetrating way. But the existential problematic is so foreign to him that in an ontological regard he is completely under the influence of Hegel and his view of ancient philosophy. Thus, more is to be learned philosophically

from his “edifying” writings than from his theoretical work—with the exception of the treatise on the concept of anxiety.’

- ii. This appears to be a reference to *Kirkens Front* [The Church’s Front]. This began as an illegal publication in 1943 founded by a theology student Johannes Dragsdahl under inspiration from Arne Sørensen, the charismatic leader of Dansk Samling, a conservative illegal organization for resistance against the Germans. The publication of the periodical continued after the war but stopped in 1958. Løgstrup is therefore criticizing some of his former allies in the resistance here. (Thanks to Ole Jensen and Hans Fink for the information in this note.)

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